

Beany, Gangleshanks and the Tub

Edward Streeter



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BEANY, GANGLESHANKS, AND THE TUB

BY
EDWARD STREETER



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TO
CLAI'RE WARREN STREETER

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HAVING passed for twelve years between the Scylla of whooping cough and mumps, and the Charybdis of chicken-pox and mumps, we arrive at the Golden Age. Then, momentarily, the dream world blends with the world of things as they are. Romance dwells, convenient, in dusty barns and unfrequented attics. A ragman's horse becomes a worthy stable-mate of Pegasus. Each passing derelict is a potential nobleman or desperado.

At no period are our sensibilities more keen. Let him beware who says, "It doesn't matter. He's only a little boy." Seldom in later life is misery more poignant or joy sweeter, though the cause be infinitely more weighty. For at twelve causes are limitless. At fifty they are pitilessly defined.

Beany, Gangleshanks and the Tub may have lived trivial lives, but they lived them with an intensity which balanced the scales. In most things they merely reflected the grown-ups only with more brutal frankness. Boys, doctors, financiers, explorers, all dig in different fields, but, consciously or not, they seek the same mental—Romance. The difference between twelve and fifty is the price which must be paid to find it.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING THE LAUGHING HORSE

A holy zeal filled the twelve-year-old breast of Beany Fleming. He had just listened to the message of the Rev. Thaddeus Hopkins, secretary of the National S. P. C. A. As a rule school talks left him in a comatose condition. Today, however, he had been prejudiced in the speaker's favor. An unprepared arithmetic lesson had been swept out of existence by the arrival of the reverend gentleman. Under such conditions Beany would willingly have become a convert to anything from back-yard gardening to the eternal wearing of rubbers.

Mr. Hopkins had made a favorable impression on the whole school. He did not fuss about soul uplift like other dreary bores who addressed them, but spoke like a man of sling shots, air rifles, tin cans, and flying stones. In fact he had gone into the sub-

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ject so minutely that he had suggested a number of new tortures which the school had never thought of before, but were anxious to try as soon as they decently could.

Beany had a code of morals entirely his own. He felt that the Reverend Hopkins had done him a favor. The least he could do in return was to follow that gentleman's wishes to the letter. Some such idea was passing through his mind when a squirrel climbed down the trunk of a tree, paused cautiously on the opposite curbing, then scampered across the street towards them. Gangleshanks instinctively swung his books on the end of their strap and let them fly. The squirrel disappeared into the branches of a tree. The books slid harmlessly along the grass and stopped under the active area of an automatic sprinkler. Having recovered them in a glutinous state they continued their walk.

"What's th' sense in doin' that? Golly day! Why don't you try an' be decent to somethin' once in a while?" enquired the new champion of the dumb.

"Aw shucks! Wha'd I do?" Gangleshanks transferred some of the lawn from the New Gradatim to his trousers. "Gee whizz, you've got to be an awful sis, Beany."

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"I ain't at all," replied Beany indignantly. "It's only a kid's trick, though, to shy somethin' at everythin' y'see."

"Well, what harm'd I do? Didn't hit it, did I?"

"No, but you might 've."

"But I didn't, did I?"

"That don't make any dif'rence."

This point of ethics might have continued interminably had their attention not been diverted by a ragman's horse and wagon which was drawn up beside the curb. On other days this was not a sight to cause any comment. Beany's mind, however, was on the lookout this afternoon for animals which might be in need of his assistance. The horse, moreover, was not an ordinary one. His long, uneven hair gave him an appearance of prophetic age. He leaned wearily against one of the maples which lined the curb on either side, his front feet crossed like those of a corner lounging. The most extraordinary thing about the horse, however, was his face. It was a tired, careworn face, yet there was a humorous twinkle about the eyes. As the boys approached the horse bared his teeth and laughed silently and heartily.

Beany and Gangleshanks stopped to admire this

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demonstration of equine facetiousness with open-mouthed amazement. Having indulged in a good laugh the grey horse closed his eyes wearily and emitted a deep sigh.

"He's most human," whispered Gangleshanks, awestruck. He was afraid the horse might hear him and be offended at the qualification.

"Golly day, look at his ribs!" said Beany. "They're bustin' out of his skin like an umbrella. Betcha dollar he hasn't had anythin' to eat for a year."

As if to testify to this the grey horse turned his head slightly and, without shifting his position, began to nibble bark from the tree. A gate creaked. Beany and Gangleshanks observed the horse's owner coming towards them.

"T'inkin' o' buyin' 'im?" He was a little man, bent from constantly carrying heavy bags on his shoulder. A stubby beard concealed the lower part of his face. This occasioned no regret once the upper part had been seen. He wore a cap, devoid of shape and so old that it looked like one of his own rags which had fluttered down and rested on the top of his head. A greenish yellow cutaway adorned his shoulders. His trousers ascended from

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his shoetops in great rolls and billows. They might have served as the models for those garments which sculptors are so fond of draping on the legs of mid-Victorian statesmen.

"That's a fine horse," said Beany, encouraged by this display of friendliness. "How old's he?" That had always seemed a good noncommittal leader when discussing horses.

"Vorty-two." The ragman threw his bag on the wagon and prepared to mount onto the rickety seat. "Vorty-two come Passover."

"Golly day, that's old! Looks kind o' thin, don't he?" Beany wondered if this was the sort of thing which the Rev. Mr. Hopkins had meant.

"He's a wery del'cate eater," explained the ragman.

"Wha'd'y feed him?" asked Gangleshanks, interested in spite of himself.

"Vun shredded veat a day," said the ragman, gathering up the reins and making a rattling noise with his tongue. The grey horse shivered from head to foot, uncrossed his legs and stood erect with difficulty.

"Isn't he a little wobbly?" ventured Beany.

"He don't stand vell ven he ain't leanin'," ex-

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plained the ragman. "There used to be two on 'em. They leaned against vun another. Then they vent vell."

He shook the reins. The grey horse staggered unsteadily away. Beany fished a pencil stub from his pocket, wet the end, and wrote on the back of the U. S. History, "Aaron Isaac, 10 Gallup Street," just as it appeared in crude letters on the side of the ragman's cart.

"What's that?" asked Gangleshanks curiously.

"Mr. Hopkins said how when we saw horses that didn't look right to find who owned 'em an' turn in the names to the teacher."

"Well, come along. Gee whiz, we'll never get started."

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CHAPTER II

THE HIGH COST OF PHILANTHROPY

They continued without further interruption until they came to a large brick house. The shades were all drawn and there was a sign on the verandah announcing that it was for sale. "We got to look out now," warned Gangleshanks, "or we'll get spotted."

They looked up and down the street. There was nothing more alarming than a butcher wagon drawn up against the curb half a block away. Turning in the driveway they walked quickly past the house to the yard. The lot was a deep one, sloping back several hundred feet and terminating in a tumble-down brick barn.

Beany picked up a piece of wood and pounded five times with it on the barn door, three times slowly, twice very quickly. A smaller door, cut into one of the panels of the large one, was opened cautiously. A fat, dirty face peered out. "Pu-pu-password," it whispered.

Beany and Gangleshanks exchanged glances.

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They both shook their heads. "We forgot," explained Beany. "Come on, Tub. Let's in before somebody sees us."

"No pu-pu-password. Stu-stu-stay out." Before Beany had time to shove his stick in the door it was shut. There was the sound of an iron hook being dropped into place.

"You let us in, Tub Hemingway, or you'll wish you was dead," cried the outraged Beany, speaking with his mouth very close to the door.

"Why du-du-don't y' gimme th' pu-pu-password then? How du-du-do I know who y' are?" asked a muffled voice from the other side.

The two ousted members held a short discussion. Then they crept quietly around the corner of the barn where there was a space of about two feet between the fence and the side wall, the burial place of tin cans and broken flower pots. In the center of the wall was a window. Beany raised it and they crawled in through a barrage of rubbish. The window, long separated from its weights, fell with a crash behind them.

"Shut up," hissed Beany. "We want t' catch that Tub alive an' murder him."

If the Tub was not aware of their presence he

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must have been deaf. There was no sound, however, but the creaking of the rotten floor under their feet. The interior of the barn was dark except for a few rays of grey light which crowded through the dirty window. There was an oppressive odor of old harness, dust, rotting oats, mice and mildewed seat cushions. The floor was littered with empty cans and broken boxes. An archaic sleigh, covered with a sheet, stood in the rear of the barn, its shafts suspended from the ceiling by slings.

From underneath the sheet came the unmistakable sound of a desperately muffled sneeze. They dragged the unfortunate Tub from his hiding place. Then, laying him on the floor, they proceeded to sit on his stomach and tickle him. This was a method, known as "The Cure," by which Beany and Gangleshanks had kept the Tub in a state of groveling subjection since the day they had discovered that his ribs were his vulnerable point.

The operation was accompanied by howls of agony. "Put his cap over his mouth," directed Beany. "He'll have everybody in town around."

Gangleshanks complied. The howling became indistinct and spluttering. "I'll 'e 'ood. I'll 'e 'ood," filtered through the cap between screams.

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Gangleshanks slowly removed the covering. Beany left off massaging the Tub's ribs and rose from his stomach.

"Wha-wha-what's th' idear?" cried the Tub indignantly, beating clouds of dust from his trousers.

"Why didn't y' leave us in?" asked Gangleshanks sullenly.

"Y' didn't have no pu-pu-pu-password."

"Well, how can we give you the password when we forgot it?"

"Y' oughtn't to fu-fu-forget."

"What's th' sense in that? Golly day, you can't help forgetting a thing. If you forget it you forget it, an' that's all there is to it."

"Shucks. Let's get goin' an' fix this place up," said Gangleshanks, bored by this legal controversy. "Gee whiz, we'll never get started if we don't get goin'." He unhooked the small front door and opened it, relieving the gloom.

"Golly day, this is a slick place." Beany looked admiringly about at the cobwebbed walls. "We can fix it up great. Look. It's got stalls an' everything."

"This is the cu-cu-club room," explained the Tub, pushing back the door of a large box stall.

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The club room had been used for years as a repository for old boxes and a home for young mice. After about an hour of hard labor, however, the boxes were removed and the full possibilities of the box stall revealed.

"The nex' thing we need's a couch," said Beany thoughtfully, sitting down on the last box and wiping the perspiration from his face with a smudgy sleeve. "A place where we can lie an' read."

"We can't all lie an' read on one couch," objected the practical Gangleshanks.

"Golly day, we can take turns 'til we get more, can't we?"

"You got to gu-gu-get the cu-cu-couch. I got the bu-bu-barn," said the Tub.

"Before we go lookin' for the couch we ought to 'lect ossifers," suggested Gangleshanks.

"I ought to be pu-pu-president," said the Tub sullenly.

"You! Why so, I'd like to know?"

"Caw-caw-cause I got th' barn."

"'Tain't your barn."

"'Sfu-fu-father's, though."

"Yes, but you know what you'd get if he caught on you was usin' it."

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"Wouldn't gu-gu-get nothin'. Just as soon t-t-tell him."

"You can be treasury," suggested Beany.

"I'm goin' t' be pu-pu-president."

Beany looked at Gangleshanks significantly. They approached the ill-fated candidate from opposite sides and seized him by the arms. At the thought of a repetition of the Cure he crumpled into an incoherent mass at their feet.

"Aw, quit y'r foolin', will yo'? Cut it out, you fellas. You'll bu-bu-be sorry soon's I ge-ge-get up." This brought forth a burst of derision. "Cu-cu-come on. Be d-d-decent, can't you?" His complaints merged into hysterical laughter and groans.

"Who's pres'dent?" asked Beany, giving his ribs a special admonitory dig.

"Yo-yo-you," gasped the Tub.

"What's that?" Gangleshanks renewed his own efforts.

"No, no, yo-yo-you," groaned the tortured victim of machine politics. Whereupon Beany, perceiving the nucleus of an interesting game, applied both hands to his work.

"Bu-bu-bu-bu-both."

"Only you're not."

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"N-n-no. Oh, Lord!"

"Let him up."

The defeated candidate rose to his feet and once more pounded the dust from his trousers. "Yo-yo-you fellas think you're fu-fu-funny, don't you," he said in an aggrieved tone. "I wouldn't be pu-pu-president of your ol' club."

"I tell you what we'll do," said Beany, perceiving a deadlock and anxious to avoid it before it became a matter of pride. "I'll be pres'dent one week an' you can be the nex', Gangleshanks."

"Wha-wha-what am I?" The greed for power was stronger than the Cure.

"You're members," said Gangleshanks. "You ought to be awful glad to be in the club at all."

Parliamentary business out of the way the matter of interior decoration came once more to the front. Beany suddenly remembered an old horsehair sofa which had long reposed in his attic. He felt sure that his mother would be glad to give it to them. He had such strong convictions on this that although he knew she was out he felt perfectly safe in taking it anyway. In fact, as he told Gangleshanks, it was just as well that she was out. He hated to bother her about such things. She had so much in her

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mind. He suggested that they hurry. She might return at any moment. Beany had suddenly become very considerate.

"Let's leave Tub here to clean up. He'll just be in the way."

The Tub was not averse to this arrangement. Walking and carrying things for long distances bored him. Beany and Gangleshanks went around by Walnut street in order to purchase a confection known as "Penny Whoppers." These were dispensed by one Mrs. McGruder for one and a half cents each. She explained the disparity between the price and the name by referring vaguely to a "war tax." They passed the time of day with Mrs. McGruder and put the "Penny Whoppers" in their cheeks to be drawn upon from time to time in succulent drafts.

Suddenly Beany stopped and examined something which lay in the grass beside the walk. He straightened up holding in his hand an object which looked like a dead silver snake.

"Wha'd'y s'pose that is?" he asked.

Gangleshanks examined it curiously. "I know," he exclaimed. "A necklace. A pearl necklace. Sis-

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ter's got one like it. Gee whiz, they're worth a wagon of money."

Beany looked up and down the deserted street.
"Who d'y s'pose lost it?"

"Don't know. Think we'd better leave it there?"

"No sense in that. Golly day, if we can't find who owns it findin's keepin'."

There was no one in sight but the postman. Obviously he hadn't dropped it. "Think we ought t' keep it?" asked Gangleshanks doubtfully.

"Sure. Why not? No sense throwin' it away."

"Wonder what it's worth?"

"Don' know. 'N'awful lot."

"S'pose it's worth five dollars?"

"More'n that, I guess."

"Gee whizz, that would buy about a million Penny Whoppers." At this thought Gangleshanks threw back his head and with half-closed eyes began considering a new life based on such an ownership.

"I know what we'll do with it." Beany stopped, overcome by the audacity of his inspiration. "We'll buy that horse."

"What horse?" asked Gangleshanks, amazed.

"The ragman's."

"Wha' for?"

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"Oh, I do' know. It's awful old an' oughtn't to work any more. We could keep it in Tub's barn an' give it a good home. It would be awful good fun ownin' a horse all by ourselves."

"Might be at that," agreed Gangleshanks, rather impressed by the idea. "How yo' goin' t' find it, though?"

"Remember his address. Ten Gallup street. Lucky I wrote it down."

"Let's go down now." Gangleshanks was distinctly a man of action. "If we hang around here we might find who owns the thing."

Gallup street might have been in Asia Minor for all that Beany or Gangleshanks knew of it. Geography seemed about to thwart their plans when a large policeman strolled into view enjoying the hot afternoon sunshine.

"Let's ask him," said Beany.

"Not the cop!" exclaimed Gangleshanks aghast.

"Sure. He won't do anything to you."

"Gee whizz, you got nerve," said Gangleshanks admiringly.

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CHAPTER III

HIGHLIGHTS AND TWILIGHTS IN GALLUP STREET

Neither Beany nor Gangleshanks had ever been so far from home before. Nor had either of them ever seen a street just like Gallup. It was narrow and the houses on either side were joined together by ropes from which hung all manner of clothes, mostly of a confidential nature. These flapped slowly back and forth giving the street a dismal holiday appearance. After struggling along for several hundred yards Gallup street gave up the attempt and ended weak-heartedly in a brick wall.

Number ten was precisely the same as number eight and nine except that beside the door was nailed a board announcing to the world that "Isaac Aaron" was a "Vendir." Beside the door was an archway. This gave entrance to a gloomy passage terminating in a pile of broken boxes. Here, it might be supposed, Mr. Aaron maintained his stables.

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The younger generation of Gallup street was abroad enjoying such air as filtered through the flapping clothes. It stopped to gaze curiously at Beany and Gangleshanks. Number ten had no door-bell, so they knocked, politely at first, then more boldly as their efforts met with no response. They had become absorbed in this pastime when they were startled by a woman's head which popped out of a window beside the door. "Vell, vell, vell, vell, vell," she repeated impatiently.

"We want to see Mr. Aaron, ma'am," explained Beany politely.

"Vell, he ain't here." The head started to disappear.

"When'll he get back?" asked Gangleshanks.

"Ven he gets here."

"Can we wait?"

"Vy should I care?" The woman gave them a curious stare and withdrew her head. The window shut with a bang.

They sat down on the steps to wait. Gallup street sensed the unusual. Its inhabitants were constantly on the lookout for just such a condition. The street ceased its sports and formed a cordon about the steps. Nothing happened, so they found comfort-

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able positions and patiently awaited developments. The two principal actors became decidedly ill at ease.

This candid inspection finally became unendurable to Beany. "See any green?" he demanded of a rangy youth whose trousers were suspended rakishly by a piece of string slung after the manner of a Sam Brown belt.

"Some green an' some yaller," replied the young man hitching the string to a more secure position on his shoulder.

The crowd considered this a rare bit of repartee. It jeered its approval and crowded closer. The action had begun.

"'S'y'r mommer know y'r out?" asked a voice from the back of the circle.

"I'll mommer you," said Beany defiantly although he did not feel too confident of it in his heart.

"Y'r nurse'll be lookin' for y'," remarked the rangy boy.

Beany's hands opened and shut convulsively. The odds were hopelessly against him, but his temper was oozing fast. It was growing dusk. Workmen were returning to Gallup street, their dinner pails in hand. They stopped and pushed their way

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through the crowd in the forlorn hope that there might have been an accident. The rangy boy grew bolder. Egged on by applause he stepped forward and pulled off Beany's cap which he held up to his delighted audience. "Ain't it purty?" he remarked.

This was too much for Beany. Seizing the cap, he proceeded to execute the gesture known in sporting circles as "planting a well-aimed blow" just west of the point where the rangy boy's trousers received the support of the string. Gallup street gave tongue and pressed closer. They wished to be in at the death.

Just what the result might have been is uncertain had not the crowd been split at this moment by the head and shoulders of an old grey horse. At the sight of Beany and Gangleshanks a glimmer of recognition seemed to cross his tired brain. He bared his teeth and indulged in one of those silent laughs which had so fascinated his self-appointed protectors in the first place. The ragman was standing up in his seat making violent swings with a stick which did no great damage to anyone. Life had made nimbleness a prerequisite in the street.

"Out o' my vay," roared Mr. Aaron. "Out o' my vay, y' gutterbred, louse-ridden sons o' t'ieves."

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With which neighborly greeting he rode through the mob and passed under the archway beside his front door. Beany and Gangleshanks, accepting the discretion versus valor theory, took refuge behind his tailboard and followed closely.

"Ged oud o' here," bellowed the ragman, perceiving them. "Ged oud, y' low-lived hunkies."

"We wanted to see you," explained Beany, making himself as small as possible behind the wagon.

"On business," added Gangleshanks. They both wished from the bottoms of their hearts that they were back on Walnut street. The word business, however, immediately roused a racial instinct in the ragman.

"Vat for bus'ness?" he asked contemptuously.

"We want to buy your horse."

"Ged oud," cried Mr. Aaron, sensing a joke. "Get oud before I wring the heads from your body off."

At this terrible threat Gangleshanks backed away several paces. Beany stood his ground behind the tailboard. Seeing this Gangleshanks stopped also and assumed a bolder front.

"We do, though." Beany put his hand in his

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pocket and drew out the necklace. "We want to trade this for your horse."

There was still light enough in the passage for the ragman to perceive the string of stones in Beany's hand. He became interested and descending from his wagon took them and examined them in the gloom. Then he looked sharply at the boys from under his bushy eyebrows. "From vere you gome by dese?" he asked.

"Found 'em," explained Beany.

"An' vat you vant to do by 'em?"

"Swap 'em for your horse."

Once more Mr. Aaron examined them with his beady eyes. "Gome id," he said. His tone had completely changed. He opened a door in the alley and they stepped into a room lit by an uneven gas-light. It was a large room and apparently served as a living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, office and warehouse. In one corner was a stove around which the woman with the tousled hair hovered like a vulture. A double iron bed stood in another corner. An uncertain table and three discouraged chairs adorned the center. Every other available space was taken up with burlap bags stuffed with the results of Mr. Aaron's collecting

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habits. They were piled high along the walls and even pushed under the bed. They filled the room with a stale, musty odor which struggled for supremacy with the smell of hot garlic from the stove.

Mrs. Aaron greeted her better half with a loving grunt. Then noticing the two visitors she turned curiously. Mr. Aaron examined the necklace under the gas light. His wife left her cooking to look over his shoulder. Then they both turned to stare at the boys.

"From vere you haf god dese?" asked Mr. Aaron again.

"We found 'em," said Beany, wishing very hard that he had not.

"An' vat vill y' do by 'em?"

"Your grey horse."

There was a whispered conversation. Mr. Aaron examined the necklace minutely under the light. "All righd," he agreed finally. "Vaid. I untie him from d' vagon."

He disappeared through the doorway. Beany and Gangleshanks, after meeting the unflinching gaze of Mrs. Aaron for a moment, turned and bolted after him. It was almost dark. The young folk of Gallup street were occupied with their evening meal.

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They led the old grey mare away with a feeling that during the last half hour the world had changed and would never be the same tranquil, orderly place again.

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CHAPTER IV

THE DIFFICULTIES OF MAINTAINING A MODERN STABLE

It was a long walk from Gallup to Walnut street. Part of the distance was covered at a trot. Beany pulled at the frayed halter shank in front while Gangleshanks urged from the rear with a barrel stave. The grey horse had not been so pushed in years. He resented it.

When they arrived at the barn the Tub had left. They tied the horse to a ring just inside the door and hurried home. Mrs. Fleming was waiting on the porch when Beany came panting up through the dusk.

"James Fleming," she said. "Do you know that you're three quarters of an hour late for supper? Where have you been? Your father's been telephoning everywhere for you."

"Oh, mother!" Beany used his most persecuted voice. "How silly! I just been foolin' round with Gangleshanks an' we forgot all about the time."

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"Forgot all about the time indeed when it's almost dark. Where have you been fooling?"

"Oh, just all over, mother. Golly day, I can't remember every little place I been all day."

"James!" Mr. Fleming stuck his head out of the library door. "Where have you been until this hour?"

"Golly day, father, how——"

"James! Where have you been?" Beany recognized a tone which demanded an explicit answer.

"Well, if you got to know everything I do, I went to school this mornin' an' at recess I fooled round in the yard an' after recess I went back into school again an'——"

"Nonsense. You know what I mean. Where have you been this afternoon that you're so late?"

"Makin' a club," replied Beany desperately.

"Making a club?" Mr. Fleming was puzzled.

"Buildin' a club," explained Beany. "Me an' some other fellas is buildin' a club."

"Where?" asked Mr. Fleming.

"Golly day, father, I can't tell you that. It's a secret club. We just plain got interested an' forgot supper."

Mr. Fleming prided himself on understanding

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little boys. He had never quite grown up himself and felt, therefore, a bond of sympathy with them. Beany knew this instinctively and threw himself on his father's mercy.

"I can't tell you without breakin' my word," he said. "You wouldn't want me to break my word."

"I guess it's all right, Grace." Mr. Fleming turned to his wife who was still standing doubtfully in the doorway. "It's no excuse for being late to dinner though. Your mother's been worried to death. I don't want this to happen again. Go up now and wash. Hurry."

A great load was lifted from Beany's mind. The crisis was over. During the course of the meal he tactfully directed the conversation to school topics; the baseball team which he felt sure of making; his certain prospects of high standing in his class; the talk of the Rev. Mr. Hopkins. By dessert things were running with un hoped-for smoothness.

Dinner over, Mr. Fleming settled down to the evening paper. "I think," said Beany, "I'll just run across the street and speak to Gangleshanks a minute."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," his father replied calmly. "You'll study your lessons for Monday."

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"But it'll only take a minute," urged Beany, his mind on the grey horse standing lonely and supperless in the barn. "I got something important to talk to him about."

"It isn't so important it won't keep till tomorrow," said Mrs. Fleming.

"But, mother, you don't know. Golly day, you say it's not important and you don't know what it is."

"For pity sake don't talk so much about it." It annoyed Mr. Fleming to be disturbed while he read the evening paper. "Do as your mother says. And don't start every sentence with 'golly day.' It doesn't mean anything."

"But, father, golly day, I only wanted——"

"Beany, didn't you hear your father speaking to you?"

"Gol——" Beany flung himself into a chair behind the library table, pulled the hated books toward him and stared at the green-shaded lamp. There was a long silence. "Couldn't I just run over to Gangleshanks for about ten minutes? I won't be gone a minute."

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Fleming. "We've heard enough on that subject now. Get busy with your lessons."

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Beany sat with his head between his hands apparently studying with all his might. As a matter of fact he was bemoaning the fate which ever brought him face to face with the laughing horse. His enthusiasm for the Rev. Thaddeus Hopkins grew stone cold. It was one thing to preach kindness, another and far more difficult task to practice it. He wondered if the Rev. Hopkins had ever taken a foundling horse under his wing. He wondered if Gangleshanks was waiting for him. He wondered how long horses could go without food. He wondered——

“Did you hear about Mrs. Pardee’s necklace?” Mr. Fleming looked over the top of the paper at his wife.

“No; what happened to it?”

“Stolen today.”

“You don’t mean it! Where was it taken from?”

“She thinks it was stolen from the house. The police are working on the case. It was a very valuable necklace according to the paper.”

“Yes, I remember it. Her grandmother left it to her. It must have been worth a fortune today.”

“Probably. I hope they get the man that took it.

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This business of lawbreaking's gone too far. Pretty soon our lives won't be safe."

"What," asked Beany, "will they do to the man that took it if they catch him?" He experienced the sensations of a prisoner who watches the jury resume their places.

"Probably fifteen years, and he deserves thirty," said Mr. Fleming judicially. "Go on with your lessons now. You must learn to concentrate when other people are talking."

Beany stared at the open pages before him. "Fifteen years and deserves thirty," he read. It was too much to grasp all at once. In fifteen years he would be a man. He pictured himself coming back to Walnut street in his prison suit. Old Nero would be waiting for him, but too old to wag his tail. And Dan, the butcher boy, would have a long beard. He gained some satisfaction from the thought that Gangleshanks would be with him. At least there wouldn't be any school. "D'y' think they'll get 'em?" he asked.

"Get whom?" asked Mr. Fleming.

"The men that took the necklace," said Beany surprised.

"Certainly they'll get them. Look here, how can

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you ever do any work if your mind's running off on every tangent?"

Beany resumed his task vainly trying to picture a mind running off on a tangent. He found it difficult to visualize a tangent. Underneath these surface ramblings lay a vague despair. He was a criminal; hounded by the police; liable to spend most of his life in jail. That morning he had been a free, ordinary boy. Morning, however, seemed years and years ago; part of another life.

As he turned the matter slowly over in his bewildered mind one thing became more and more clear. In some way or other the laughing horse must be returned to Mr. Aaron and the necklace recovered. According to Beany's code of morals the necklace was his as long as he remained in ignorance of its proper owner. Now that that person had turned up it was a question in his mind if he had not actually committed a theft. The horse must go back the following morning. Luckily it was Saturday.

"Oh, Beans," a familiar voice was calling from the porch just outside the library window.

"Can't I go out an' speak to Gangleshanks Braceworth?" he asked. "He's right on the porch. It won't take a minute."

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"Are you through with your lessons?" asked the innocent Mrs. Fleming.

"Golly day, mother, you don't have to study a couple o' years just to do a couple o' sums." Beany considered direct lying as wrong.

"Well go ahead, only don't go any place. Why don't you bring Gangleshanks in here?"

"Oh, he doesn't want to come in *here*, mother. We want to *talk*."

"All right. Put on your cap."

"Oh, *mother!* Just to go outside?"

"Put on your cap or you can't go out."

"For heaven sake don't argue about everything that is suggested!" exclaimed Mr. Fleming.

"Golly day!" Beany disappeared through the door. Gangleshanks was waiting outside.

"Have you heard?" he asked. Gangleshanks had. They discussed the news in awed whispers. It was obvious that the horse must go back. Beany outlined his plan for getting him out through the alley the following morning. What to do with the necklace when they recovered it from the ragman raised a new problem. They finally decided to drop it in the grass where it was originally discovered, then find it all over again.

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The next thing to be decided was the matter of feeding. "Gee whizz, I never knew a horse was so much trouble. I don't see what y' wanted th' ol' thing for in the first place."

"I didn't want it. It was you that wanted it."

"Me!" exclaimed Gangleshanks amazed. "I should say not. I didn't want th' ol' horse. Not *me*. Oh no."

The cornerstone of an argument had been laid. Further building was interrupted by Mrs. Fleming, who appeared in the doorway shading her eyes from the hall light. "Won't you come in, Gangleshanks?"

"Oh no, ma'am. I got to go right home. I just came over to talk to Beany about something."

"Don't stay too long, then. It's most bedtime, Beany." She reentered the house, leaving them alone once more.

"Gee whizz, you got to go to bed early," remarked Gangleshanks contemptuously.

"Oh, that's all right," replied the chagrined Beany. "*That* don't mean nothin'. I can stay up's long's I want."

A whistle from one of the houses across the street interrupted them. "Oh, Harry," called a male voice. "Come on now. Hurry up."

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"Gee whizz," muttered Gangleshanks. "Oh, *all* right." He threw into his voice all the weariness which can be conveyed in a shout. They agreed to meet right after breakfast, feed the old horse and escort him to his Gallup street home.

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CHAPTER V

DOWN BUT BY NO MEANS OUT

The following morning they were abroad unusually early even for Saturday. They went at once to the barn, stopping for the Tub on the way. The latter's eyes popped visibly when he heard the story. "Gu-gu-gosh!" he exclaimed sympathetically. "You fellas are in for it n-n-n-now."

"Wha'd'y' mean when y' say '*You* fellas?'" asked Gangleshanks suspiciously. "Why don't you say '*we're* in for it?'"

"Caw-caw-cause I ain't got nothin' t' do with it."

"You got just as much as we have."

"N-n-no I ain't."

"It's your barn, isn't it?"

"That du-du-don't make no d-d-difference."

Beany glanced at Gangleshanks. The Tub understood the look and folded his arms instinctively over his ribs. "Lu-lu-look out now, you fu-fu-fu-fellows," he warned.

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"I guess we'll have to, Tub," said Beany sorrowfully. Whereupon they laid the helpless Mr. Hemingway on the grass beside the walk and proceeded to convince him of the truth of their arguments. The Tub's howls for help resounded up and down the street unanswered.

"Oh Lu-Lu-Lord! Look out what y'r doin', will y'?"

"Who's in trouble?" asked Beany, shifting one knee from the Tub's stomach to his chest.

"I am," wailed the Tub, and his voice carried a true ring.

"Who's to blame for this whole thing?" demanded Gangleshanks, sensing a solution to the problem.

"I-I-I am. Oh, Lu-Lu-Lord! Cut it out, will you. Gu-gu-gosh, what do you fu-fu-fellows think—— Ouch! Oh, du-du-don't." The Tub went into fits of agonized laughter.

They released him. He arose and made a perfunctory attempt to brush the grass stains from his clothes. "Gu-gu-golly, you fu-fu-fellas think you're smart," he remarked. This was ignored. The trio proceeded amicably on their mission.

They opened the door of the barn and squeezed

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through. At first they were unable to penetrate the gloom. Then, as their eyes became more accustomed to it, they failed to see the grey horse.

"He's gone," said Beany aghast.

"Look." Gangleshanks was pointing.

Beany looked down at his feet and started back. He was staring straight into the smiling features of the grey horse whose head was on a level with the floor. It was standing quietly and unharmed in what was apparently a shallow cellar of the barn. About its feet was a litter of boards and splinters; the wreckage of the floor. At the moment the laughing horse was busily engaged in devouring what remained of the flooring, evidently under the impression that the quickest means of escape was by eating his prison.

The conspirators looked at one another in dismay. A hasty examination showed the cellar to be a small four-foot affair with no other entrance than through a trap door cut in the floor of the barn. If the grey horse had been put in a steel safe and the combination thrown away it could not have been more securely caged.

"Looks like we got to keep him the rest of our lives." There was a gloomy fatalism in Beany's

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

voice. At this moment the horse threw back his head and baring his teeth gave vent to one of his long, silent laughs.

"It's your fault, Tub. If you didn't have such a rotten ol' barn we could 'a' taken the ol' horse back. Now we can't ever take it back."

"I d-d-didn't ask y' to put it there," said the Tub, paving the way for another punishment.

"Now that we got to feed it all the rest of our lives what 're we goin' t' feed it on?" Beany had reached the point where he enjoyed making things sound as complex as possible.

"Perhaps it's thirsty," suggested Gangleshanks. They found an old pail full of tin cans. When emptied it held water fairly well. They lowered a pailful into the cellar on the end of a rope. The horse drank greedily and muzzled the pail in its search for more. Three times they filled it and three times the grey horse sucked it up like a fountain pen filler.

Having drunk the horse heaved a deep sigh and laughed up at them contentedly. The next thing was to feed him. Beany and Gangleshanks turned to Tub. His father had the distinction of being the only man in town who kept carriage horses.

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"What do horses eat?" asked Beany.

"Oats," replied the Tub promptly, proud at being referred to.

"How many?" asked Gangleshanks.

"Oats du-du-don't come by the many," explained the Tub. "They come by the bu-bu-bu-bu——"

"Bag?" suggested Gangleshanks impatiently.
"Well, how many bags?"

"It du-du-depends on the horse," said Tub vaguely, not having the slightest idea.

"Where we goin' to get the oats?" asked Beany.

"How about Tub here? There's plenty in his barn."

"Why p-p-pick on me?" complained the Tub.
"How'm I goin' t' get'm?"

"'Cause you *got* to," said Beany threateningly.
The Tub folded his elbows over his ribs.

"Yu-yu-you fellas ha' got t' help me then," he said sullenly.

They trudged over to the Hemingway barn. Old Patrick, who had for years resisted the temptation to become a chauffeur, was hitching the bays into the brougham. Mrs. Hemingway was about to go shopping. For once things were breaking in their favor.

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Patrick regarded them suspiciously. To his mind three idle boys were a precursor of trouble. He led the bays into the drive, climbed onto the box and shook his head dubiously as he drove off.

The oats were stored in an empty stall. With difficulty they rolled a bag onto a short ladder which was leaning against the rear wall of the barn. Then, giving one end to Tub, Beany and Gangleshanks took the other and they staggered away with their booty, through the hedge and cross lots to the laughing horse.

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CHAPTER VI

THE SHADOW OF THE LAW

"They found Mrs. Pardee's necklace," said Mr. Fleming suddenly, suspending his carving knife over the steak. Beany swallowed his water the wrong way and choked.

"If you only wouldn't drink so fast," said his mother, patting him on the back. "One would think you only had a moment to eat your dinner. Where did they find it, Harry?"

"The detectives found it in a pawnshop. Funny thing. I was talking to Pardee about it this afternoon. It seems they traced it to an old ragman whom they've arrested. He claims two boys gave it to him in trade for his horse. Of course the police don't believe the story. His description of the boys was very vague." Beany breathed easier. "Said it was quite dark and all he noticed about them was their caps."

"How absurd!" said Mrs. Fleming. "Every boy

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

wears a cap. That might have been Beany here for all you could tell." She smiled over the table ferns at her son. Beany made a brave attempt at merriment but only succeeded in making a face.

"Of course," said Mr. Fleming, "the police are on the lookout, but I don't think there's much doubt that the ragman took it."

"Will they send him to jail?" Beany tried to make his voice sound natural.

"I should hope they would," replied his father grimly.

The meal continued. "What's the matter, dear?" asked Mrs. Fleming, noticing Beany's half-emptied plate.

"I don't think I care for steak as much as I used to," he explained weakly.

"Nonsense!" replied Mr. Fleming. "You've been filling yourself up with trash down at that Mrs. McGruder's. Why do you let him ruin his digestion at these places, dear?"

"No I haven't, honest, father."

"Then eat your dinner and don't let's have any more nonsense about not liking things. When I was your age——"

Beany knew the rest of the formula by heart.

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His father had lived in a terrible age when the rights of little boys were on a par with those of an African slave. He made an effort and swallowed what remained on his plate. The conversation drifted to other topics.

"Are you going down to the club tonight?" asked Mrs. Fleming after dinner. Mr. Fleming always visited his club on Saturday night, although none had ever been able to find out what he did there and he usually came home with a grouch, vowing he would never go again.

"Not tonight," he said. "It's pouring."

Beany sauntered nonchalantly out into the hall. "Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Fleming.

"Oh, I guess I'll run over to Gangleshanks a minute," he said in his most casual tone.

"Not tonight you won't," said Mr. Fleming. "In this rain. Why it's absurd. Why don't you ever stay home once in a while? I'd planned to have my family round me tonight for once. Never saw such a restless boy."

"Yes, Beany. We'd like to see something of you once in a while. You've been with Gangleshanks all day. Why don't you stay home this evening and talk?"

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

"Oh, *mother*, what is there to *talk* about?"

"Lots of things," said Mr. Fleming decidedly. "You're not going over to the Braceworths' tonight, so there's an end of it."

Beany flung his cap on the hall bench and stalked back into the living room in his most dignified manner. He sat down stiffly on the edge of an arm-chair opposite his father and waited. The latter was deep in the evening paper.

Five minutes passed marked only by the loud ticking of the clock. "I don't see any sense in sittin' around just to watch you read y'r paper," remarked Beany. "I thought you wanted to *talk*. Let's go ahead and *talk* and get it over with." Beany's idea of a family conversation was an explanation as to why he had or had not done something.

Mr. Fleming looked up impatiently from his paper. "Talk! Talk!" he repeated as if he had never heard the word before. "What's the matter with the boy, Grace? I never saw him act so strangely."

"Beany's all right," she said. "You invite him to stay home for a quiet chat and then you bury yourself behind your paper."

"Oh, very well!" Mr. Fleming tossed the offend-

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ing paper to the ground and gazed moodily at the fire for several moments. "You didn't have a very good report this week, Beany," he said finally, passing his hand wearily before his eyes as he was wont to do when introducing such a subject. There was a familiar whistle from the verandah.

"That's Gangleshanks, mother," cried Beany, starting up.

"Hasn't that boy any home?" asked Mr. Fleming, picking up the paper with a relieved expression.

"It's all right to go out an' talk to him a minute?" Beany ignored this question and appealed to his mother.

"I suppose so. Ask him to come in."

"Oh, Gangleshanks wouldn't want to come *in*. I think he just ran over to see me on some business. I'll talk to him on the verandah."

"All right," agreed Mrs. Fleming. "Only put on your hat and shove up the latch on the front door so that you can get in again."

Beany was out of the house before these directions were finished. Gangleshanks met him with a worried look. "They found it," he said.

"I know," Beany nodded. "Dad told me at dinner."

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

"What we goin' t' do now?" asked Gangleshanks. His trust was beautiful. For once, however, Beany wished that he was more independent.

"It's an awful mess," he replied noncommittally.

"The p'lice are after us." Gangleshanks was full of cheery bits. "We got to get that ol' horse back to the ragman without no one knowin' anything about it."

"That's sensible, that is. How you goin' to get him out of the barn? How you goin' to get him back to the ragman when the ragman's in jail? How you goin' to do anything I'd like to know?"

Gangleshanks looked as if the first thing he might do was to cry. Then he suddenly gripped Beany's arm and crouched behind the post. "Look," he whispered. A policeman was moving slowly towards them up the front walk. They held their breaths. Then to their inexpressible relief he branched off onto the small walk that led around the side of the house in the direction of the kitchen.

"S'pose he saw us?"

"Don' know. S'pose he's goin' round in back so's we can't get out that way." By hanging over the verandah rail it was possible to see the steps of the back porch. They watched the policeman mount

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half way up, then shake himself like a wet dog. There was a glare of light as the kitchen door opened to admit him. It threw long forbidding shadows on the wall of the house next door. The light was shut off and nothing was heard but the pelting of the rain on the tin roof over their head.

"Let's peek in the kitchen window an' see what he's doin'," suggested Beany. Regardless of the rain which was dashing in spiteful gusts against the house they climbed over the side rail of the verandah. The situation was too grave to permit the use of steps. The kitchen shades were pulled down, but Beany discovered one which cleared the window frame by a few inches.

By standing on Gangleshanks' shoulders he was able to reach the window ledge and gain a restricted view of the interior. The sight which he saw chilled his blood. The policeman had divested himself of his dripping raincoat and had drawn up a chair near the stove. Hannah was busy pouring hot water from the teakettle into a large tea pot. Over the back of the chair hung his club ready for instant use.

"D'y' see him?" whispered Gangleshanks

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hoarsely. The strain of holding Beany on his shoulders was beginning to tell.

"Shut up."

There was a short silence during which Gangleshanks' shoulders wobbled perceptibly. "Goin' to stand there all evening?" he asked in indignant sotto.

"Keep still, can't you?" In order to make this more emphatic Beany leaned down towards his supporter's ear. The shifting of weight was too much for Gangleshanks. His shoulders gave a last convulsive wobble and collapsed. The two outlaws disappeared into the mud.

They held their breaths for a moment. It seemed to them that the crash might have been heard for blocks. There was no other sound from the house, however, but an hysterical laugh from Hannah. "You went an' did it now," whispered Beany, wiping the mud from his hands.

"How did I go an' do it? You expect me to hold you up in the air all night like an acrobat?" Then his curiosity got the better of his indignation. "What was he doin'?"

"Let's get out of here first." Beany led the way back to the verandah. Gangleshanks started to climb up to its friendly shelter. "No, don't go up.

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He could catch us too easy if he popped out the front door." Beany's literary tendencies kept him posted on the ways of professional sleuths. "He's waitin' for us in the kitchen. I guess he found out we was out."

"What're y' goin' t' do?"

"Stay here 'til he gets tired waitin'," replied Beany calmly.

"I'm gettin' all wet."

"Well, what of it?" exclaimed Beany impatiently.
"Would you rather be wet or in jail?"

"I'd rather be in jail as long's it was dry."

"Here he comes." Beany pulled Gangleshanks down beside him into the shadow of the porch. A light shone from the front door. Someone came out.

"Beany," called Mrs. Fleming. "Beany."

Here was a predicament. Not knowing what to do they did nothing. The light patch on the wet grass was darkened by another figure. "James." Mr. Fleming's voice was pitched in no uncertain tone.

There was no help for it. As well confess now, thought Beany, and go to jail as to prolong the agony. "Yes, sir," he replied meekly, and appeared

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around the corner of the verandah followed by Gangleshanks. To his surprise his father and mother were alone on the porch entirely unsupported by the police.

To anyone not acquainted with the facts the boys presented an extraordinary sight. They were dripping wet and their clothes, faces and hands were plastered with mud. "James Fleming! Where have you been?"

Beany made an unsuccessful attempt at non-chalance. "Just talkin' to Gangleshanks," he said.

"Come into the house this minute," commanded Mr. Fleming. "Gangleshanks, go right home. I'll let your father attend to you."

"And now, young man," he said when the front door had banged ominously behind them, "go up to your room and go to bed. I'll be up and talk to you later." Never had an order sounded so musical to Beany's ears. It meant that in some unaccountable way his father was in ignorance of the law sitting cosily in the kitchen waiting for a favorable opportunity to enmesh him.

"I don't understand that boy lately," said Mr. Fleming when the talk was over and he sat once more with his wife. "He does the most unaccount-

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able things and offers the silliest excuses. Told me he went off the verandah to talk business with Gangleshanks so they wouldn't disturb us."

"Perhaps it's just as well not to try too hard," replied his philosophical wife. "Beany's not a bad boy. I'm sure of that. You can also be sure that he's got good reasons in his own mind for every move he makes."

And Beany, overhearing this speech from his position half way down the front stairs, stole back to bed with the feeling that his mother was the only sensible person in the world except Gangleshanks.

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CHAPTER VII

OATS, LIKE MURDER, WILL OUT

The next day was Sunday. Beany dreamt all night that the grey horse was dragging him down Walnut Street on the end of a pearl necklace. When he woke up the rain had ceased and a fresh breeze was fanning the curtains of his bedroom. He ran to shut the window and saw a policeman strolling along the sidewalk in front of the house. A fresh realization of his worldly cares descended upon him like a blanket. The police were watching the house.

"I don't think I'll go to church this morning," he announced at breakfast. He pictured the grey horse patiently dying of starvation in the cellar of the barn.

Mr. Fleming looked up from his paper crossly. The events of the previous evening had not left him in a Sunday mood. "Why not, I'd like to know?"

"I have a lot of stuff to do around here," explained Beany.

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"Nonsense! You'll go to church with your mother and me just as usual."

"Yes, sir." Beany was mindful of certain injunctions which he had received ten hours previously. The meal passed off quietly if not pleasantly.

The journey to church was an ordeal to Beany of which no one dreamed. His one comfort lay in his hat which was of the Sunday felt variety and afforded him a partial disguise. It is doubtful, however, what might have happened had a policeman loomed up round the corner. He observed with satisfaction that Gangleshanks was also in church wearing a subdued and holy look.

Sunday dinner was usually an event. Today, however, it was an ordeal. Immediately it was finished Beany slipped out by the kitchen route to prevent embarrassing enquiries. Gangleshanks was waiting impatiently outside. Silently they proceeded to the Tub's home, prepared to inflict the most terrible punishments if he should hesitate to furnish them with more oats. The Tub met them at the door in a state of great excitement. He had grown appreciably thinner in the last forty-eight hours.

"Ol' Pat's mu-mu-missed the bag o' oats," he

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whispered. "Du-du-don't say nothin'. He just told fu-fu-fu-fu——"

Mrs. Hemingway came out into the hall to see who was there. "Come right in, boys," she said. Mrs. Hemingway was the kind of a woman who was always making a fellow sit on the edge of a chair in the library and tell her about his family. She also had an irritating habit of noting an increase in Beany's growth each time she saw him. Never had her hospitality been more unwelcome.

"Here's Jimmy Fleming and Harry Braceworth," she announced, pushing the unwilling guests before her into the living room.

"War'y,'" grunted Mr. Hemingway without coming out of the Sunday paper.

Mrs. Hemingway was not to be evaded so easily. She must know about Gangleshanks' baby sister and if Mrs. Fleming had yet succeeded in getting a maid. "I do believe, Beany, that you've grown," she said finally. "Stand up with your back to Alexander. I shouldn't be surprised if you were taller than he is." This interesting experiment was never carried out, for at that moment there was a disturbance in the back hall, a door was slammed and old Patrick, the coachman, burst into the room. His face was

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distorted with excitement and he was breathing hard as if he had been running.

"The saints preserve an' keep us from what I just been seein'!" he exclaimed. Mr. Hemingway put down his paper hurriedly and removed his spectacles.

"What's the matter now, Patrick?" he asked in a martyred voice.

"It's th' divvil hisself is in this thing an' well did I know somethin' like this 'ud come of it when the bay mare backed into that lookin'-glass in the barn."

"But what's happened?" asked Mr. Hemingway impatiently.

"Well, sor, when I left ye I sat down to thry an' figger who it might be as had taken them oats. All at onct I sees a little thrail uv th' things leadin' from the barn door to th' hedge. 'Ha, ha,' says I, an' follows it, through th' hedge, across th' lots an' up to your own barn door."

"My own barn," repeated Mr. Hemingway, puzzled.

"Yes, sor. The barn on that vacant place o' yours down the street. I turns in with th' thrail, opens th' door an' steps in. As I hope t' be saved the sight what met me oies would 'a' stopped the heart

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uv a weaker man.” At the recollection of it Patrick wiped the perspiration from his face with his sleeve. Having thus prepared it, he crossed himself reverently.

“Well, well. What did you see?”

“Well, sor, ye’ll nivver believe it but th’ floor uv th’ barn had opened clean up so’s y’ could see right down into th’ botthomless pit. An’ there at th’ botthom of it was th’ ol’ boy hisself, his head throwed back an’ his teeth bared right in me foice.”

“Nonsense! What’s this all about?”

“May I die unblessed if I be not tellin’ th’ truth, sor!” exclaimed Patrick fervently.

“I suppose I’ll have to go over with you. You’ve probably seen something that’s been stored there for the last ten years and you’ve never noticed before.”

“An’ it’s divvil a step will I go near that barn again,” said Pat firmly. “It’s notice I’m givin’ y’ now, sor.”

“I never heard such rubbish.” Mr. Hemingway went out into the hall for his hat. “I’m going over to see what this is all about,” he said to his wife.

“Wait a moment. I’ll put on my hat and walk over with you.” If it was really the devil her

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woman's curiosity prompted her to see what he might look like. Patrick shook his head and faded away in the direction of the kitchen. The Hemingways departed. The boys were left alone.

"Now you done it," said Beany. "What did you want to go dropping oats all over everything for?"

"What did *I* drop oats for?" Gangleshanks was indignant. "Why, didn't *you* drop 'em just as much as *me*?"

"Well, I'm glad *I* didn't have nu-nu-nothin' to do with th' ol' haw-haw-haw-horse," said the Tub complacently. Beany and Gangleshanks looked at him in amazement.

"*You* didn't," said Beany. "I'd like to know why you didn't have just as much to do with it as *us*. More. It was *you* that thought of the barn in the first place."

"The whole *thing* is your fault," agreed Gangleshanks. "If you hadn't wanted to have a club in your rotten ol' *barn* we'd never have thought of the horse."

"Du-du-don't you think I'm goin' t' take any o' th' blame," said the Tub, instinctively backing away. This movement proved to be his undoing. It suggested the same thing to both Gangleshanks and

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Beany. With one mind they advanced upon him. The servants were all out. The house was deserted. With the skill of long practice they seized their victim and laid him on the rug.

"Yu-yu-you lemme up, now," warned the Tub. "You'll bu-bu-be sorry if you du-du-du-du——" Something in the set faces of his tormentors roused his fears that this was about to be a Cure even more severe than usual. "Yu-yu-you leggo, Beany Fleming. Gu-gu-get offa me, Gangleshanks. I'll tu-tu-tell father. I'll——"

Just what else he proposed to do will never be known for at that moment Beany flipped a corner of the rug over his face. Never had the Cure been applied more scientifically. The gurgling groans of the victim would have warmed the heart of an inquisitioner.

Beany ceased his rib-gouging for a moment. "Do you swear," he asked solemnly, "never to tell who was the other members of the club?"

"Do," came the stubborn response.

The torture was resumed. "'Es, 'es. I swear. Oh! Ugh! I sw-wu-wear."

"Do you swear," continued Beany triumphant, "to take all the blame for the horse?"

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"'Es, 'es," came the muffled affirmative. "Lu-lu-lem up. Do anydig."

"Remember," warned Beany, removing the corner of the rug but still maintaining his position of advantage on the Tub's stomach, "if you ever tell we'll do this for an hour straight."

"Or more," added Gangleshanks. "If we have time."

"Queer thing about that necklace business," said Mr. Fleming as they sat at supper that evening. "I heard this afternoon that they found the ragman's horse in Hemingway's barn. I think his son knows all about it. Hemingway's trying to hush the whole thing up. The ragman has been released. Fine piece of nonsense the whole thing."

"I never did like that Hemingway boy," said Mrs. Fleming. "He's too fat. You know him, don't you, Beany?"

"Not very well," said Beany discreetly.

"Well, I shouldn't have anything to do with him at all. I don't think he's a very good companion for either you or Gangleshanks. He seems to be rather a wild sort of a boy."

"Yes, sir."

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"I never thought that necklace was stolen, anyway," said Mrs. Fleming. "That Mrs. Pardee's a flighty sort of a person. She'd be very apt to jump at conclusions."

"I never thought it was either," agreed her husband. And thus was the subject of the necklace shelved forever.

"Oh, by the way," said Mr. Fleming later in the evening. "I met the Rev. Mr. Hopkins today, Beany. The one that talked at your school and that you liked so much. I asked him here to supper next Sunday night. He seems like a very nice man."

"Who? That ol' pie crust?" said Beany disrespectfully. "Whoever said I liked him. Golly day! Excuse me! I guess I'll go over to Gangleshanks that night."

The following morning the Tub found a paper pasted under the cover of his desk. It depicted in the most gruesome details a human skull surmounting a pair of crossed tibiæ.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE INVINCUBEL ATHELETIC CLUB

A red-faced man in a grey flannel shirt was working on the connections of a fire alarm box. Beany, Gangleshanks and the Tub paused to watch him. After a brief inspection the Tub sought out a convenient stepping-stone and sat down wearily. Being a vessel of heavier tonnage than either Beany or Gangleshanks their stop-and-go method of travel wearied him. The Tub considered walking one of the necessary evils to be classed with getting up in the morning and brushing the teeth. He preferred to accomplish such things with one supreme, continuous effort.

Beany and Gangleshanks, however, believed in self-education. Their weekly school reports showed that it was the only kind which they did sanction. On this afternoon they had not wasted a moment since school let out. At the corner of Main and Berkeley Streets they had studied art from a gentle-

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man in a brimless straw hat who was obliterating a Liberty Bond appeal with a three-foot boiled ham. At the end of the next block they had taken a lesson in engineering from a city official who was attempting to bail out a manhole with an old broom. Now they were quite prepared to receive some instruction in applied electricity.

They had passed this fire box so often that its familiarity had robbed it of any special interest. Under the manipulation of the red-faced man, however, it assumed new possibilities. Beany noticed for the first time the raised silver letters on its crimson front. He read them aloud, as he read everything from street car ads to moving picture headings, apparently under the impression that none else was similarly gifted.

"In case o' fire break the glass an' pull down the hook." He digested this information for several seconds. "Fire where?" he asked.

The man paused in his work and looked at them blankly. Beany noticed that his face exactly matched the box and wondered if this was one of the rules of the fire department. He pointed to the letters.

"Fire where?" he repeated.

The man peered around the side of the box at the

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inscription as if he had never seen it before. "In your gran'mother's room," he said finally and resumed his work.

Beany could think of no appropriate reply to this remark. He had an uncomfortable feeling that there was a joke concealed in it somewhere. He made a face which might pass for a laugh if there had been a joke and as a mere nervous twitch if there had not.

The red-faced man looked up again after a few moments and seemed surprised to find them still there. "She ain't got a fire in it, has she?" he asked.

Beany shook his head doubtfully without venturing further comment. The Tub remained comatose. When they moved on once more he fell in behind them without a word. During the last month the Tub had changed. He accepted life with the unnatural calmness of a man who knows himself to be doomed. It had already dealt him some heavy blows. He expected more.

Yet he persisted in clinging to the coattails of his evil genii. For many days after the discovery of the laughing horse Beany and Gangleshanks had waited for their world to come crashing about their ears. When it continued to remain firmly upright,

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however, they began, like so many others in the same position, to look upon themselves as Supermen. Snapping their fingers in the face of fate they visited the vacant barn once more in search of inspiration. In a room on the second floor they found it. The idea of a club once more took possession of their minds and overshadowed the results of their previous attempt. Experience counts for nothing at the age of twelve.

The Tub had been drawn into this adventure against his will. He was like a swimmer caught by the current above a falls. After a few weeks of struggle he had resigned himself to the inevitable and floated passively with the stream, endeavoring to get some small enjoyment out of life before reaching the precipice.

In the middle of the block they turned, cut across the uncut lawn of a vacant house and disappeared down the drive. They entered the barn through the small door. Gangleshanks shut it carefully after them and hooked it on the inside.

A short ladder lay against the wall in the rear of the barn. Beany raised it to the edge of a trap door in the ceiling.

“Got everythin’?”

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"Yep. Go ahead."

They climbed the ladder and disappeared through the hole one after another. Then a hand appeared and the ladder rose jerkily after them. They were in a loft formed by the sloping roof of the barn. It appeared to have been used in the past principally for the storage of dust. There were stalactites of dust hanging from the rafters. Small puffs of it rose from the floor as they walked across it. A beam of sunlight struggling through the single window disclosed myriads of particles chasing one another languidly round and round. The very air smelt dusty, due no doubt to the fact that it was not contaminated by any outside influences. The window was not of the modern kind which opens.

At one end of the loft was a trapeze. At the other a pair of rusty flying rings hung dejectedly. An old couch, which had long since parted company with its buttons and whose springs had exploded in some places and receded in others, stood in the middle of the floor. By its side was a kitchen table in a constant state of indecision as to which three legs it would stand on. A number of antique magazines were scattered about. All these comforts were explained by a large pasteboard sign nailed above

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the window on which was printed "INVINCUBEL ATHELETIC CLUB."

Beany threw himself carefully on the sofa. A considerable amount of skill and experience was necessary to execute this maneuver, for the sofa was as tricky as a bucking horse. Having established a balance he gazed appreciatively about him.

To an ordinary observer the quarters of the INVINCUBEL ATHELETIC CLUB would have contained little to allure. In fact an unimaginative person like Mrs. Fleming would have probably called it a filthy hole. That would have been because she could not see it with Beany's eyes. The latter had once taken a trip to New York with his father. They had dined at the University Club. His present surroundings represented to him the luxury and comfort which he had observed there.

Gangleshanks opened a drawer in the table and took out a cigar box. This he opened with much ceremony and brought forth three half-smoked cigarettes.

"Why don't you fellas mark 'em?" he complained, unable to identify his own.

"I did," said Beany. "Mine's marked with a pencil."

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"Mu-mu-mine's the shortest," stammered the Tub, who considered the consumption of tobacco more of a grace than an enjoyment. He was willing to waive hygiene in order to reduce quantity.

Gangleshanks studied the three half-burnt cigarettes once more and then distributed them. Selecting a match from the cigar box he lit his own, blew out the match and passed the box to Beany.

"Say!" exclaimed the latter with withering contempt. "Don't you know you're supposed to light mine first?"

"Who was your nigger servant last year?" enquired Gangleshanks with dignity.

"That shows all you know about smoking," cried Beany. "You always light everybody else's cigarette before you light your own."

"My father doesn't," asserted Gangleshanks stoutly.

"Father calls a fella that lights his own first a Cornell man."

"Maybe that's it," compromised Gangleshanks, willing to drop the subject.

The Tub lit his cigarette and having failed to acquire the sofa, lay down on a long, coffin-like packing box which was the third and last article of furni-

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ture on the inventories of the INVINCUBEL ATHLETIC CLUB.

Beany reclined with as much ease as the eccentricities of the couch would permit. Filling his mouth with smoke he began to let it trickle slowly out. Then, feeling a cough approaching, he blew it forth hastily in a great blast.

"Did you ever see anybody send in an alarm?" he asked finally.

Gangleshanks shook his head.

"Golly day, I bet they can go." He blew a second cloud of smoke through his pursed lips. "I'm goin' to keep my eyes out for fires an' see if I can't ring in one sometime."

"Me, too," said Gangleshanks.

The Tub said nothing. He was engaged in grinding his cigarette to a pulp under his heel so that his fellow clubmen might not discover how much of it was left.

"Do you s'pose if I broke the glass every fire engine in the city would come runnin' up?"

"Sure they would," replied Gangleshanks. "Before you could say Jack Robinson."

Beany thought this over, his lips forming Mr. Robinson's name several times. After a few ex-

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periments he felt that Gangleshanks had slightly overstated the case. The cigarette had made him feel languid. Gangleshanks selected one of the periodicals from the table and began to read. It was entitled "Pearl Handled Pete; or The Ranchman's Peril." The Tub had relapsed into a doze.

"How hard d'you s'pose 'tis to break the glass?" asked Beany, after a long silence.

Gangleshanks was unaware of the question. The Ranchman had been just faced with both barrels of P. H. Pete's famous guns. "'You cowardly cur!' he said, folding his arms. 'Shoot.' "

"How hard d'you s'pose it would be?" insisted Beany.

Gangleshanks looked up impatiently.

"What're you talkin' about?" he asked.

"The glass! The glass! Can't you understand English? Golly day! You can't remember a thing two seconds."

"Can so. I don't keep talking about the same thing all day, though. Ask the Tub. I haven't time to tell you everything."

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CHAPTER IX

THE ORACLE

Beany forgot all about the matter until the following morning when he was proceeding unenthusiastically towards school. He noted the fire box in its accustomed place. It reminded him of a red-faced bully defying the world to hit him. He thought of it again during the day along with sundry other matters which had no bearing on his education.

On his return from school he made several passes at the box with his fist, then, observing a policeman, he continued on his way making ugly jabs and side swipes at the air in order to give the impression that this was merely an arm exercise which he indulged in while walking.

The human senses have a happy way of adapting themselves to their surroundings by disregarding certain sights and sounds which would otherwise become unbearable through the monotony of repetition. By means of this instinct of selection we

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are able to ignore the constant flashing of telegraph poles past the windows of a train, the roaring of a falls, or the frequent passing of street cars in the night. Unfortunately, however, we cannot turn our senses on and off like a water tap. Once these impressions have been voluntarily registered on the field of consciousness they stubbornly refuse to be submerged again.

Such was the relationship between Beany and the fire box, although he was not aware of it in just those terms. He had turned on the faucet and was unable to shut it off again. What had formerly been an unimportant part of the general landscape now became a living pest which mocked him from every corner telegraph pole, daring him, tantalizing him, taking advantage of his curiosity.

The box near the Invincubel headquarters was the most belligerent. Each time he passed it seemed to cry, "You don't dare. Yellow!" Once he tried throwing stones at it. He received such a fright, however, when one of them struck just over the little glass door that he never repeated the experiment.

At first Gangleshanks took but little interest in the matter. Gradually, however, Beany made him

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feel the tantalization of it. It was like painting "Danger" on a door, then leaving it unlocked.

Beany would stand silently before the box for minutes at a time. This was of itself proof that most unusual things were going on in his mind. He pictured to himself the results of the simple operation described on the cover. At a motion of his finger the big red motors would begin to roar. Street cars would stop. Automobiles would crowd to the curb. Traffic policemen would wave their arms. The movement of a city would pause momentarily just because Beany Fleming said so.

Even the most alluring things, however, must give way to the march of events. An individual who advertised himself as the "Human Fly" arrived in town, and proceeded to climb the face of the Ludlow Building in defiance of Newton and police regulations, thereby giving an immense impetus to the ambition of every boy in town. The fire alarm was momentarily eclipsed.

And so it came about that they sat once more in the Invincubel Atheletic Club discussing the virtues of the Human Fly and the possibilities of a similar career provided one began early enough—and lived long enough. They stimulated their minds with

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three more cigarettes borrowed from Mr. Fleming's box.

Tobacco had been introduced among the Invincubels when athletics had sunk to a very low ebb and the life of the institution had been threatened. None of them enjoyed it especially, but each felt that such an admission would be a sign of weakness. They puffed stoically, therefore, with much outward gusto and inward discomfort.

The real thrill was born of the necessity of kissing their parents while the traces of their guilt most easily detected by such devotional acts were still upon them. Beany found that by holding his breath his chances were reasonably good. Fate had almost overtaken him one evening when Mrs. Fleming, after sniffing at his clothing, remarked to her husband, "I think it's dreadful how your smoke gets into everything. Even Beany smells of tobacco just from being in the room with you." There was a dreadful moment of suspense until Mr. Fleming had replied in a vaguely uncomplimentary manner from behind his paper that if it wasn't tobacco it would be something else.

The danger had been lessened by the discovery at Mrs. McGruder's candy shop of a remarkably

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strong peppermint ball. Two or three of these would have counteracted ammonia.

Beany pinched out his cigarette and replaced it in the cigar box. He was of the Oriental school which deems a few puffs ample.

"Got any pep'mint balls?" asked Gangleshanks, immediately doing likewise.

Beany searched through the drawer. "Not a one," he said.

"Le's go down to Mrs. McGruder's."

The Tub, who had acquired the sofa, yawned. "I think I'll stay here."

"An' let us go down an' get 'em for you, I s'pose."

"I du-du-du-don't feel good," explained the Tub.

"Rats!"

"Golly day, let him stay there," said Beany contemptuously. "We don't need him."

"I should say not."

Before they had lowered the ladder the Tub's eyes were shut. Before they had reached the bottom he was happily dozing.

"Le's take the ladder away," suggested Beany. His alert mind seldom missed such opportunities.

Gangleshanks agreed with enthusiasm. The lad-

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der was placed on its side in the corner of the barn. They departed, much pleased with their cleverness.

Their errand was not a pressing one and their progress was, in consequence, rather Pickwickian. The fire box once more claimed their attention. Beany rapped on the glass with his knuckle.

"I bet I could break it just doin' that," he said.

"You better not monkey. There's nothin' they'd like more'n sendin' you to jail."

"I don't see how they're goin' to send you to jail," argued Beany. "S'pose you think there's a fire when there isn't. They can't send you to jail for bein' mistaken. Golly day, if you think there's a fire you certainly ought to turn in the alarm."

Gangleshanks considered this logic for some time, his head on one side. "I guess that wouldn't do much good," he concluded finally. "The firemen 'ud be so sore 'cause you'd got 'em out o' bed they'd put you in jail anyways." He had heard his father often speak of getting into his clothes like a fireman. He concluded therefore that all firemen spent their idle moments in bed.

They continued to argue this point half-heartedly until they reached Mrs. McGruder's. That good woman's husband was sitting in the window reading

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the newspaper. As a drawing card Mr. McGruder ranked on a par with the candy which his wife sold. He indulged in snuff which in itself would have been enough to hold the public interest. As an added inducement, however, he maintained one foot constantly swathed in bandages and supported on a kitchen chair.

This foot had been the subject of much speculation among the store's customers. Once while waiting with his mother in a doctor's office Beany had looked into a medical book. Among other enjoyable horrors he discovered a colored picture of a foot from which the skin had been removed in order to show the position of the muscles. He had immediately concluded that Mr. McGruder's foot must look like this. By throwing in a few revolting details of his own invention he had focused the attention of the entire neighborhood on that gentleman's extremity.

Mystery had tended to give Mr. McGruder a reputation as a sage. This was his contribution to the welfare of the shop. He was conscious of his power and enjoyed it. A question having been presented to him, he would lower his spectacles to the end of his nose and look at the speaker intently

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for several seconds as if unable to believe that such a simple problem should have been offered for his consideration. He would then pronounce a verdict with unqualified decision. Mr. McGruder's mind was clear cut on any subject not related to his own affairs. Those he left entirely to his wife.

As the little bell over the door tinkled Mr. McGruder looked up and nodded. Beany and Gangle-shanks bought their peppermint balls, and having perched themselves on the window ledge, gazed earnestly at him. Without changing the position of his newspaper Mr. McGruder returned their stare over his spectacles and nodded again.

"Mr. McGruder," said Beany as soon as the peppermint ball had dissolved sufficiently to allow his jaws their normal freedom of action, "did you ever ring a fire alarm?"

"Oh, yes," replied the sage decidedly, indicating by his tone that it was a daily matter during his more active years.

"Did they try to put you in jail?"

Mr. McGruder appeared startled. He lowered his glasses on his nose, and looked over them. "No," he said. "No. They didn't put me in jail."

"Was there a fire?"

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"Certainly." He was apparently puzzled by the question. "That was why I rang the alarm."

This remark contained so much common sense that Beany hesitated before he asked his next question.

"What would they do to you if you rang a fire alarm an' there was no fire?"

Mr. McGruder studied this problem with as much earnestness as if the guilty party had just been dragged before him for judgment.

"Jail," he said finally. "Fer not less than five years."

"But s'pose," insisted Beany, "that you thought there was a fire an' you found out afterwards there was none."

"Jail," repeated Mr. McGruder unbendingly. "Fer not less than five years."

"But I shouldn't think anybody would dare turn in the alarm if it was like that," said Beany. "If I saw a fire I wouldn't turn in the alarm for fear I only thought it was one and it wasn't really."

Mr. McGruder removed his glasses entirely and wiped them on the end of his necktie in order that he might think more clearly. "Accordin' to the law," he said finally, replacing his glasses, "there's

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got to be a fire o' some kind. It don't make much difference what kind o' a fire 'tis long's there's one around somewhere. If there ain't—jail, fer not less than five years."

Having delivered himself of this judgment, Mr. McGruder picked up his newspaper which had slipped to the floor and began to read once more as if to indicate that that was all the advice to which they were entitled with a four-cent purchase. They looked at him for several seconds with puzzled faces. It was sometimes difficult to follow Mr. McGruder's law.

CHAPTER X

THE DANGER OF DULL AFTERNOONS

They retraced their steps towards the Invincubel Atheletic Club languidly. The afternoon threatened to drag unless something unforeseen happened. Just inside the barn door stood a number of garden tools and an iron wheelbarrow.

"Le's rake out the yard," suggested Beany.

"Wha' for?" asked Gangleshanks surprised.

"We'll make some money. When we get it all done we'll have the Tub tell his father about it. He'll give him some money for it."

"What good'll that do us?"

"Well, you don't s'pose we'd let him keep it, do you?"

This put the matter in an interesting light. The wheelbarrow and the rakes were set to work collecting the two-year deposit of leaves and rubbish which strewed the yard.

This industry had proceeded for almost ten minutes when the drone of an aeroplane engine filled

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the air. They ceased immediately and squinted up into the sky. The aeroplane was a tiny speck directly above their heads.

"How far do you s'pose he is?" asked Beany.

"Five or six miles," estimated Gangleshanks.

"Golly day, I'd like to be up there."

"Yes, you would! You'd be so scared you'd fall right out."

"Is that so? I s'pose you could do it easy."

"I didn't say I could."

"Golly day, if I didn't have no more nerve than you got I wouldn't talk about what I could do."

Gangleshanks set down the wheelbarrow in order to concentrate on a bright and crushing rejoinder. "You make me tired," was the best he could produce. He felt that this was a trifle flat.

"Well, you make *me* tired. You're always talkin' about how brave you are an' you'd jump out o' your skin if anybody said 'Boo.' "

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so."

They stood glaring at each other, suddenly hostile, with no knowledge or thought of the cause.

"Well, I bet I can stump you any day."

"Le's see you do it."

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This promised to be more exciting than raking, which had already begun to pall. Gangleshanks looked about him for some daredevil feat with which he might humiliate his opponent.

"Le's see you walk this," he said, climbing up on the high board fence which separated the two yards. He stood upright unsteadily and staggered along the top of several feet. Then after a moment of semaphoring he jumped.

Beany watched him scornfully. "You couldn't do it yourself," he said. "How're you goin' to stump a fellow when you can't do it yourself?"

"How didn't I do it?" cried Gangleshanks indignantly, brushing some fresh earth from his knees. "Gee whizz, you wouldn't be satisfied unless a fellow walked up an' down 'til his shoes was wore out. Le's see you get as far."

Beany climbed the fence and started to walk along the top with a great show of unconcern. Gangleshanks looked worried. "Hey," he cried sharply. At the sound of the voice Beany's nonchalance vanished. His arms began to revolve like those of a Cape Cod wind vane. A moment later he was seated in a strange flower bed. Someone came out on the back porch of the house next door.

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"Little boy—you get right out o' this yard or I'll call a policeman."

"Yes'm." Beany started to climb back hastily over the fence. When he reached the top he began to moan. Once on friendly soil he sank down upon it heavily and seizing his ankle with both hands assumed an expression of excruciating pain.

"What's the matter?" asked Gangleshanks suspiciously.

"I sprained my ankle."

"Rats!" replied the cynic.

"Honest." To prove it Beany let go of his ankle and began to writhe on the grass. Gangleshanks looked undecided. A nickel slipped from Beany's trouser pocket. Gangleshanks lost no time picking it up. Beany ceased to writhe.

"Gi'me that," he demanded, snatching at his property.

Gangleshanks backed away, then turned and ran towards the barn. Beany sprang to his feet and started after him. Although it must have cost him great pain, he didn't even limp.

"There." Gangleshanks stopped triumphantly and handed him the nickel. "I knew that was the

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kind of sprained ankle you had. Gee whizz, I never saw such a baby."

Beany, finding himself in a corner, slipped out of it by the simple expedient of ignoring the subject entirely.

"I bet you one thing," he said. "I bet I can stump you."

"Le's see you."

Beany thought for a moment, then placing his head on the ground he threw his feet into the air and remained poised for an instant upside down while a number of curious objects fell from his pockets. Gangleshanks did the same.

Beany climbed a telegraph pole which stood in the rear of the yard. He went to the top climbing-spoke and touched the pole above him as high up as he could reach. Gangleshanks stretched to a point about an inch higher.

Both contestants were getting angry. Beany looked about for some dizzy height from which he might hurl himself and end the contest. If he broke his neck he felt that would still further humiliate Gangleshanks.

The telephone pole passed close to the eaves of the barn. Beany climbed it once more and wriggled

AND THE TUB

his body onto the sloping roof. Working his way along the gutter he came to the front. Gangleshanks watched him uneasily from the ground, twelve feet below.

"What're you goin' to do?" he asked.

"Jump," said Beany shortly. And as he said it he knew that he was a liar. From the ground the eaves of the barn had not seemed unreasonably high. From his present position he felt like a balloonist. The back yards stretched away on either hand in orderly sections. Gangleshanks, standing below him, looked like a mere speck. He felt that it would be suicide to jump. He thought of his family and the great obligations which he owed to them. He thought of Harry Hodges, who had merely fallen off the verandah when he was a baby and was forced to go through life with a poker strapped to his leg in consequence.

Gangleshanks in the meanwhile stood leering up at him.

"Why don't you jump?" he asked.

"I guess I don't have to 'til I want to," roared Beany. "I—I like it up here."

"Yes, you do." Gangleshanks had an irritating manner at times.

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"It's great," said Beany. "Come on up. I think I'll stay up here a while."

"You're scared to jump," remarked his persecutor.

"Am not." As he said it Beany made himself still flatter against the roof. A piece of shingle became dislodged, slid down the roof, and rested in the gutter. Beany started at the noise. Then it gave him an idea. He began to kick the gutter with his toe, loud enough for Gangleshanks to hear it, but without allowing him to see what made the noise. Then he stepped to one side hastily.

"Golly day," he said. "The gutter's breakin' down. I got to get off this place I can tell you." He worked his way back to the telegraph pole and climbed down with as much haste as caution would permit.

"Golly day!" he exclaimed, reaching the bottom. "I guess that was a pretty narrow escape."

Gangleshanks' face expressed utter indifference to the peril. "You were scared," he said simply.

Rage, such as provokes men to kill, blurred Beany's eyesight. "I'll show you if I'm afraid or not," he fairly shouted. "I bet you don't dare——" He looked about for something that would overtax

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Gangleshanks' courage, but which he was quite sure of being able to do himself. The yard offered few possibilities. At that moment a devil, cloaked as an inspiration, entered his soul.

"I bet you don't dare turn in the fire alarm."

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CHAPTER XI

EXCURSIONS AND ALARMS

Gangleshanks took an involuntary step backwards. It was as if Beany had said, "I bet you don't dare stab the cook." Then he came to the conclusion that this was merely another bit of bravado.

"Nor you," he retorted.

"Don't I?" Beany's jaw closed tight. His face wore a peculiar, screwed-up expression. It was the face of a man forced to the wall. "Don't I?"

He started out the driveway, Gangleshanks following awestricken at his heels. When half-way out he stopped. His companion breathed a relieved sigh.

"Look here," said Beany. "If I do this an' there's no fire we go to jail."

"Why we?" began Gangleshanks, but Beany ignored him.

"'Member what ol' man McGruder said. 'If there's a fire somewherees they can't send you to jail.'"

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"Don't be a nut," was Gangleshanks' only comment.

"Well, I'm goin' to light one."

Beany turned back into the yard. Along the fence corner the leaves had been blown into a drift half a foot deep. Pulling a box of matches from his pocket he lit several and held them under the pile. His enterprise was rewarded by a few thin curls of smoke which quickly blended into a single column. Beany stepped back scarcely able to credit his own audacity.

"Now you done it," announced Gangleshanks comfortingly.

But somewhere within Beany was the spirit of Sydney Carton.

"Pooh!" he said. "Old Pat does that every day. What d'you s'pose they do with all the leaves? Keep 'em?"

Having no ideas and little interest on the subject Gangleshanks was silent. Beany turned his back on the smouldering pile and walked firmly if not briskly up the drive. Only once did he waver and look back. A large cloud of smoke slanted skyward across the yard.

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"I guess they can't put us in jail for that fire," he said.

If Gangleshanks had offered the least argument he would have found a ready listener. Before crime of such magnitude, however, he was dumb. As they approached the fire box their pace grew slower. Beany stopped and turned to look once more in the direction of the yard. Fanned by a stiff breeze the leaves were apparently catching in fine shape. A good-sized column of smoke was now rising over the roof of the vacant house. It traveled across the yards and over the city until it was caught and dispersed by the winds.

A man came out of one of the houses across the street. He turned and walked away from them. Beany heaved a sigh of relief. "We got to wait 'til he goes," he said. He felt like a man who, having boasted that he always took cold baths in the morning regardless of the temperature, finds that the water has momentarily ceased to run in the faucets.

"He won't see you," said the relentless Gangle-shanks.

"No, of course he won't," snapped Beany. "Whoever said he would? How do you know he won't

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hear us, though? You don't know how much noise this thing is going to make. It may ring the darn ol' alarm right here."

This was a new thought. Gangleshanks looked about him dubiously.

"That's right," he agreed. "I guess we better wait."

To Beany's tortured imagination the man was equipped with seven league boots. He tore down the street with the speed of a whippet and was out of sight in an instant. They took a step nearer the alarm. A delivery wagon rattled slowly round the corner.

Beany feigned an exasperation which he did not feel. "Golly day! Now I got to wait 'til *that's* out o' the way." He stood irresolute. "Perhaps it might be better to wait 'til there wasn't so many people around."

"I thought so," said Gangleshanks with the nearest thing to a sneer of which he was capable.

Anger once more reinforced Beany's ebbing morale. "All right, I'll do it now. I'll show you soon's that wagon get's out o' the way."

He prayed that the wagon might stop at every

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house to deliver goods. He hoped that every cook in the block would regale the driver with a meal.

He was doomed to disappointment. Instead of stopping, the driver suddenly rose from his seat and began to belabor the horse's flanks with the end of the reins.

"Gidap," he cried, and the animal broke into a frightened canter. To Beany, whose time sense was accelerated a thousand per cent, the horse appeared a veritable Pegasus.

"Gidap, you lazy hunk o' crew bait," called the affectionate driver. Horse and driver tore down the street and disappeared round the corner with dizzy speed.

Beany looked in vain for further interruption. Goldsmith might have used the street as an inspiration for his poem. Once more he was face to face with the red tormentor.

He turned for a final look at the smoke from the burning leaves. The column had doubled in size. If Mr. McGruder was a dependable authority they were technically safe. Never apparently had the time been more propitious for experiments with fire alarms. Just then Beany was struck by a happy thought.

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"Golly day, I wonder if these darn fools think a fellow is goin' to break the glass with his finger. I guess we can't do anything 'til I go home an' get a hammer."

"You don't need a hammer," said Gangleshanks cheerily. "Use this." He offered Beany a huge jackknife which would have been equal to the task of cracking a safe.

Ordinarily Gangleshanks was the last person in the world to have a helpful suggestion. If anything dropped down a grating he never had the least idea how to get it out. Once, when Beany had caught his finger in a wringer, he had to go all the way upstairs and get his mother to explain how they might liberate it. Now, however, he had suddenly become a mine of resourcefulness. Beany felt instinctively that it would be useless to struggle.

"I may break the knife," he warned.

"Go ahead," said the generous boy. "It's an old one."

"I thought you just got it for your birthday?"

"Oh, well, I don't care about it."

Beany shut his eyes, took a long breath and struck at the little pane of glass. There was a tinkle and

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an exclamation. He had struck so hard that he had hurt his finger on the side of the opening.

"Pull it. Pull it," cried Gangleshanks, jumping up and down with excitement. "Pull it down." He seemed to feel that this operation was somewhat like mixing a bromo seltzer; once it was started it must be finished with despatch or the desired effect was lost.

Without releasing his breath Beany inserted his finger in the opening and pulled down the hook according to Hoyle. The box broke forth into a series of wheezes and clicks, then lapsed once more into immobility.

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CHAPTER XII

FIRE !

They looked at one another, their eyes twice their normal size. If the trees which bordered the street on either side had come crashing to the pavement, if the sedate brick house behind them had split asunder, they would have thought nothing of it. Such actions would have been entirely compatible with existing conditions.

They stood there staring and motionless for what seemed an age. It was in reality fifteen seconds. Beany was the first to regain consciousness. "Golly day," he said.

"Gee whizz," replied Gangleshanks in a reverent tone. Further comment would have been out of place.

They both glanced down the street. Not a soul was in sight. The very stillness was more ominous and terrifying than if the street had burst forth into bedlam at the first click from the box. It

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was the lull before the storm which foretells the confusion to follow.

As their minds began to function once more the instinct of self-preservation was the first to manifest itself.

"Le's get out o' here," said Beany. His voice was thick as if he was suffering from asthma.

On the other side of the street stood a large brown house whose grounds were surrounded by a hedge. With mutual accord they started towards it, at first walking rapidly, then breaking into open flight. Once prone on the grass behind the hedge they breathed more easily. Looking through the branches they could see the smoke rising in a yellowish grey column behind the roofs.

Far away they heard the long drawn wail of a motor fire engine. Gangleshanks clutched Beany by the arm. They waited. The noise grew louder. It was joined by another, higher pitched note. The fire department was running in full cry.

The first piece to arrive was a big, lumbering engine truck. It drew up near the curb not twenty yards away. Firemen sprang down. The hose was attached to the hydrant. Another piece drew up and another. Lines of hose began to snake their

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way about the street. Front doors were opened. Women with anxious faces appeared on verandahs and lawns. Men came running from gardens and barns. A policeman rounded the corner.

Having attached the hose the firemen looked about them uncertainly. Questions were asked. Heads were shaken. There was much excitement, but no fire. Then, the stage having been set, the chief arrived with sliding tires. The fire department, eager to put something out, looked at him expectantly.

Beany and Gangleshanks watched him pause to speak to a fireman in a white helmet. He pointed in the direction of the vacant house behind which the smoke was rising more densely than ever. The chief gave an order and started for the yard. The fire department followed. The entire population of the block fell in behind.

Beany looked about and saw to his surprise that instead of being hidden behind the hedge as he had supposed they were surrounded by people. They were all talking excitedly and paid no attention to either Gangleshanks or himself. Now that the danger had been definitely located they flocked out

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of the yard and across the street in an effort to get nearer to it.

Beany and Gangleshanks stood up and looked uneasily in the direction of the Invincubel Atheletic Club. They were almost alone now. The crowd had pressed closer to the fire. The police had arrived. An air of gaiety hung over the scene. Walnut Street was being treated to a welcome diversion.

"Golly day, they'll be sore when they find it's nothin' but leaves," said Beany, scratching his head thoughtfully. The magnitude of what he had done was just beginning to dawn upon him. The cheering, happy crowd, the snorting engines, the busy firemen were all the results of his work. Now that the deed had been accomplished without any great calamity falling about his head he began to feel some of the prestige which must be his for evermore.

Gangleshanks said nothing, but looked at him admiringly. For the time being he was Beany's servant. All thought of competing with this master mind had been abandoned.

"Gee whizz," he said. "You got nerve."

Beany's small chest swelled to the limits of its expansion. He tried to look bored. "Le's walk

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across the street an' see what they're doin'," he suggested carelessly.

"Go over there!" exclaimed Gangleshanks more and more astonished at his companion's audacity.

"Sure. Nobody's goin' to notice you in that bunch."

On either side of the deserted house the crowd watched the work of the firemen in the backyard. The boys crossed the street and pushed their way into a tiptoeing group. By dint of relentless squirming and shoving they managed to reach the front ranks with no other opposition than a number of comments on their manners and bringing up.

Beany stuck his head between a portly cook and a postman. The backyard, which fifteen minutes ago had been such a peaceful, dreary waste, was now filled with men and fire hose. And then his eyes once more grew large and round. The fire, which he had lit so trustingly, had crept along the leaves banked against the fence until it reached the barn. Here it had gone in for bigger things.

The entire corner of the barn was wrapped in small flames which had climbed to the roof and were rapidly spreading along its shingled surface. Two firemen were mounting ladders with hand ex-

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tinguishers. Then as Beany watched he saw a tongue of flame shoot from the downstairs window.

A fireman, equipped with a spike-nosed axe, came forward and attacked the door. He might have opened it with the knob, but that would have lacked technique. At each blow the crowd gave vent to its approval with a delighted shout. Two other men with picks began to rip the boards from the fence where it ran beside the barn.

"Knock down d' barn," advised a young man with an unpleasant complexion who had wormed his way in next to Beany.

"See 'f y' c'n breek it all up 'fore it burns," suggested a voice from the rear. Whereupon the crowd laughed and the policeman selecting a few of the best-looking housemaids, pushed them back playfully. The fire had developed an excellent spirit of camaraderie among the inhabitants of Walnut Street.

Beany turned to Gangleshanks so quickly that he inflicted bodily injury on the pimply-faced young man at his side.

"Sa-ay. Who d'y t'ink y'r walkin' on?" inquired that personage, emphasizing his question with a shove. But Beany paid no attention.

"The Tub," he gasped.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE ELIXIR OF FAME

Gangleshanks' face turned several shades lighter.
“Gee whizz. Don’t you s’pose he’s out by this time?”

“Certainly not. Golly day, that Tub wouldn’t wake up if he was roastin’ to death. I’m goin’ to let ‘em know.”

He attempted to crawl between the postman and the cook. A hand descended on his shoulder with no uncertain grip.

“Keep back there, now, an’ don’t have me a-tellin’ y’ no more,” said the voice of Law above him.

“But the Tub——” began Beany frantically, torn between fear of the uniform and his desire to save his fellow clubman from a horrible death. “The Tub——”

The rest of the sentence was drowned. “Go on wid y’ now, or I’ll give y’ somethin’ to make y’ remember y’ wished y’ had.” With which jumbled threat the Law flourished its stick menacingly.

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"Come on," whispered Gangleshanks. "Le's go round the yards an' come up from the side."

They wriggled out of the crowd, ran down the street and entered a yard, separated by several houses from the scene of the fire. They took the two intervening fences as if they had been hurdles and found themselves in the yard adjoining the burning barn. Two firemen were dragging a hose to the rear. A policeman, who was standing near the kitchen door discussing the situation, saw them and started in their direction. Beany began to run pointing to the barn as he approached.

"There's a fella up there."

"Get out o' th' way," said the fireman, as Beany planted himself directly in his path.

"There's a fella in there burnin' to death," cried Beany desperately. All these people acted as though they were deaf.

The two firemen paused and looked at Beany in astonishment. "Where?"

Beany pointed to the small upstairs window in the side of the barn. One of the firemen shouted something to the next yard. The chief came over to the fence and stared curiously at Beany and Gangleshanks. He appeared to take more interest

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in them than in the unfortunate being who was being pot-roasted within.

"Come, come," he said finally, apparently at loss for any better command.

Beany felt the hand of the Law once more upon his shoulder. He wriggled from under it and ran towards the fence.

"A boy—up there—asleep," he shouted, translating the situation into the simplest possible language and pointing at the same time to the main window of the Invincubel Atheletic Club.

The chief turned to a fireman who was standing behind him and gave an order. A ladder was raised against the window. A fireman ascended and with a few blows from an axe demolished it to the approval of the most exacting spectator. He crawled in. A moment later the face of the astonished Tub appeared in the opening with the fireman behind him.

The Tub looked out at the confusion of the yard, at the crowds, at the smoke which hung heavily in the air. Then he rubbed his eyes in bewilderment and looked again. The fireman said something to him. Very gingerly the Tub climbed out of the place where the window had been and began to

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descend the ladder. At this unexpected treat the crowd went wild. Then they began to criticize the Tub's physique which was admirably displayed against the evening sky.

"He won't burn. He's too fat," cried a voice which sounded like that of the bad-blooded young man.

"Where'd you get them legs?" inquired another interested spectator.

A gentleman on the outskirts of the crowd requested the firemen to save his child.

While this dramatic incident was taking place an automobile drew up near the house and a large, red-faced man got out hastily. It was Mr. Hemingway who had just received word from a neighbor that his vacant house was on fire. He pushed through the crowd in time to see his son make a sensational exit from the burning barn.

The Tub, both mortified and mystified, reached the ground safely. He was seized upon by a waiting policeman and brought before Mr. Hemingway.

"That was a close un f'r th' yung un, sir," said the officer, touching his cap.

Mr. Hemingway needed no explanation. He had seen. Gratitude and thanksgiving filled his honest

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heart. Grabbing the Tub he hugged him before the entire crowd. Then, as the young man's face came close to his, he relaxed his embrace to sniff curiously. Disciplinary instincts superseded those of affection.

"You've been smoking," said Mr. Hemingway.

The fire was extinguished. The damage was slight. The crowd melted away disgruntled. The engines departed. Quiet settled down once more on Walnut Street.

Mrs. Fleming held out the paper to Beany as he came down the stairs the following morning. On the front page was the story of the fire. In headlines above it Beany read the words:

YOUTHFUL SMOKER'S NARROW ESCAPE
BOY TRAPPED IN BARN FIRED BY LIGHTED CIGARETTE
SAVED BY PASSING COMRADES
QUICK WIT OF JAMES FLEMING AND HARRY
BRACEWORTH CAUSES RESCUE

Mrs. Fleming glowed with pride.

"Beany, darling," she cried, "we're so proud of you."

And Mr. Fleming beamed at his son over his

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coffee cup. He had never noticed what a chip of the old block he was until this morning.

"That was great stuff," he said. "Great stuff!" Then, fearing that someone might accuse him of emotionalism, he added, "I don't see why you didn't save something worth while when you were at it. If I were that fellow's father he'd never pass a cigar store again without a scream of pain."

Beany swallowed his breakfast with hasty gulps. In honor of the occasion he was allowed an unlimited supply of griddle cakes. He waved them away, however, after the third helping and rose from the table.

"Why, you're not going to school yet, are you?" asked his surprised mother. "You're half an hour early."

"It's a good thing to be early," said Beany virtuously.

A few moments later he and Gangleshanks, who had never been known to be on time before in the history of the school, sat on the front steps and said good morning to the first pupil to appear.

And never a twinge of conscience and never a doubt as to their worthiness shook their honest souls.

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CHAPTER XIV

SUNDAY, A DAY OF REST

The usual Sunday morning silence hung over the house. Mr. and Mrs. Fleming, separated by a double barrier of Sunday paper, consumed their coffee and toast absently. The third place at the table was vacant.

Mrs. Fleming glanced at the clock on the mantel, drained the last few drops from her coffee cup, and arose. "He must have gone to sleep again. I haven't heard a sound from his room."

"It's all nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Fleming, pushing the illustrated section from him with some heat. "There's no reason in the world why he shouldn't get down to breakfast with the rest of the family. Here it is a quarter to ten. He's going to be late to Sunday School."

"He's *not* going to be late," Mrs. Fleming assured him firmly. "He never has been and he's not going to commence today of all days."

She disappeared upstairs and opened the door of

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Beany's bedroom. A head emerged from the air-tight cavern between two pillows where it had been buried to shut out the light. Without opening his eyes Beany turned an agonized face towards the door.

"All right, mother. I'm gettin' up."

"Beany, do you know what time it is?"

"It isn't late. Golly day! It doesn't take me a couple of hours to dress, you know."

"James Fleming, you get out of bed this minute."

"Yes, mother."

Mrs. Fleming entered the room and closed the bedroom door behind her. Beany heard the noise and, interpreting it as a withdrawal, allowed his head to drop once more to the pillow where he lay contentedly curled up—a small ball of comfort.

To his surprise, the covers suddenly flew from his body and he found himself lying on the mattress, unprotected from the fresh morning air. He rolled over on his back and, half opening his eyes, looked up crossly.

"Golly day, mother, I'll get up. You don't have to do that. People can't wake up all of a sudden the way you seem to think they can. It takes a

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couple of minutes to get awake. Golly day, that's a fine——”

“Beany, get right out of that bed. You have just three-quarters of an hour to dress and get your breakfast and get down to the church. You're not going to be late. I can tell you that right now.”

Beany slid limply across the bed on his back till his feet touched the floor. Then he sat up and rubbed his eyes.

“Do I have to go to that old Sunday School again?”

“You do. And you know it perfectly well, so there's no need of bringing that up.”

“But, mother, this is the last day. They don't teach you anything today. Everybody just sits around and they hand out prizes. Couldn't I just go to the picnic an' leave out goin' to the church?”

“Certainly not. This is the one day in the year when the whole school must be there.”

“But, mother, I'm not goin' to get any prizes. All I'll do is just sit there. Golly day, it's not much fun just to sit there.”

“Never mind if it's fun or not.” Mrs. Fleming's voice competed with the noise of roaring waters from the bathtub. “You don't go to Sunday

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School to have fun. You go to learn how to behave."

Beany stalked sullenly into the bathroom. He felt that Sunday was a day of rest for everybody but himself. If the Bible proclaimed the Sabbath as a workless day, he reasoned, and if it was a dependable authority as he had been taught to believe, then why should he be hauled forcibly from bed each Sunday morning and made to go to a school where his very presence belied the teachings he received?

Mrs. Fleming returned before he had finished dressing. This was the day on which the Sunday School had its commencement exercises. The gallery would be filled with fond and critical parents. Mrs. Fleming was determined that if Beany were not to figure among the sheep neither would he figure among the goats.

In honor of the occasion, therefore, he was crammed into an objectionable new suit and a pair of painfully unscratched tan shoes which squeaked. To accentuate his misery Mrs. Fleming insisted upon supplanting his ordinary black string tie with a large, stiff, bow affair. He backed away as she

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brought it into the bedroom as a horse backs away from its bridle.

"Golly day, you're not goin' to make me wear that thing, are you?" he asked with a voice of horror.

"Now there's nothing the matter with this tie," said Mrs. Fleming, who had anticipated a battle. "You don't like it just because it's new."

With a swift gesture she encircled his neck and began to poke the tie beneath his Eton collar. Beany raised great pleading eyes to her face.

"Mother, you don't want me to look like a sis, do you?" he asked, with great earnestness.

"There's nothing sissy about this tie," replied Mrs. Fleming firmly, continuing to pat and pull.

"All right," in a martyred voice. "If you an' father want me to look like a little girl I s'pose I got to. An' when people say, 'Who's that sissy over there?' I s'pose I got to tell 'em I'm Beany Fleming an' that's the way my mother makes me dress."

"Now if you brush your hair again put a towel over your collar so that you won't get it all wet," said Mrs. Fleming giving a few last pats to the bow.

"I'll take it off." Beany's tone changed from pleading to rage. "I'll rip it off before I get near the old school. I won't go lookin' like a——"

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"Beany, do you want me to call your father?"
Mrs. Fleming laid her hand firmly on her son's shoulder.

Beany gave an indirect denial to the question by commencing to sniff. His lip trembled and he turned away his head.

"Golly day, I think it's a darn, dirty, mean shame," he cried chokingly. Having delivered himself of this sentiment he rushed out of the room.

"Beany! Come here!"

But the indignant revolutionist was already half way down-stairs.

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CHAPTER XV

THE DISADVANTAGES OF PUNCTUALITY

The Sunday School was assembled. The main floor of the auditorium was filled with scholars. The parents hovered above in the balcony like ministering angels. A table, on which were placed a number of books and a water pitcher, stood in the middle of the small stage.

From the benches rose a restless hum accompanied by much scraping of feet. This grew louder and louder as the moments passed. The five occupants of the last bench were engaged in crowding the sixth into the aisle. The hum rose to a roar; then subsided suddenly as the Rev. Mr. Swope and Mr. Coffin entered the room.

Immediately behind them appeared Beany. Beads of perspiration rolled down his face, his collar was wilted. His breath came in agonized pants. Gangle-shanks reached out and pulled him into the rear seat.

“Gee whiz, can’t you ever get any place on time?”

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he whispered as the school rose to its feet while the principals took their places.

"Who's not on time? There's no sense comin' the night before, is they?"

But Gangleshanks had lost interest in the question. He was examining Beany's costume.

"Where'd you get that tie?" he asked.

"Don't you like it?" Beany was in no mood for criticism.

"Oh, lu-lu-look at the shoes!"

The Tub's voice was penetrating. A number of Bible students turned to see what was the matter.

"You shut up!" exclaimed Beany frantically, "or you'll get the——"

The Rev. Mr. Swope prevented the Tub from learning the rest by opening the exercises with a short prayer. From above nothing could be seen but bent backs and bowed heads. If one had been concealed under the rear bench, however, he would have witnessed a violent battle between a pair of new tan shoes and two pairs of mature black ones. Superiority of numbers won. The blond contestants emerged from the skirmish, as the prayer ended, considerably scarred.

Beany, however, was himself a past master at the

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art of persecution. It was always his policy when he felt himself becoming the object of attack to shift the burden onto shoulders less skillful in deflection than his own. He looked about now for some such unfortunate.

Directly in front sat Victor Octavius Spence. Beany noted his presence with relief. Victor Octavius was the shining light of the Sunday School and, in consequence, an obnoxious object to those members whose rays were so dim as to be almost invisible to the naked eye.

He removed a pin which held one of the wings of the offensive tie flat against his chest. Hostilities ceased as the attackers observed this act with wary eyes. He stuck the pin through the edge of his shoe-sole in such a way that the point projected slightly beyond the toe. Then crossing his knees and folding his hands in his lap he directed a face of earnest attention towards Mr. Coffin.

A small, taut portion of Victor's anatomy extended over the edge of the bench. Into this Beany inserted the pin point ever so slightly. It was a delicate operation calling for a light touch. To have carried the joke a fraction of an inch too far would

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have liberated forces calculated to give unwelcome publicity to the rear rows.

A tremor passed over Victor's frame as his nerves communicated the presence of foreign matter to his brain. He looked behind him and frowned. But every eye in the back row was turned towards the stage with absorbed interest. Puzzled, he turned his attention once more to the platform. Beany felt that by keeping his wits about him he might yet be able to live down that terrible tie and those squeaky shoes.

Mr. Coffin read a short report of the work accomplished by the Sunday School during the year. Then the real business of the morning began—the awarding of the prizes.

"First prize for scholarship," announced Mr. Coffin in a dreary, nasal voice. "Victor Octavius Spence."

Victor went forward to receive the prize—a volume of poems. His poise was remarkable. He ascended the small flight of steps leading to the stage, took the book from Mr. Coffin's hand with a slight bow, then, turning, stared calmly out over the audience for a moment before he redescended into their midst. Mutual disgust overflowed the

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breasts of Beany, Gangleshanks and the Tub. They felt that one of their sex had not only been put through a degrading and humiliating ordeal, but had made matters worse by appearing to enjoy it.

The next few prizes were awarded to little girls, unsupported by any acclamation from the back row. Beany yawned.

"Golly day, I wish they'd let us out of here an' go on their ol' picnic."

"You bet," agreed Gangleshanks heartily. "I don't see no sense makin' us come here an' listen to this ol' thing. Why don't they give 'em their prizes out there?"

"First prize for good behavior," chanted Mr. Coffin. "Victor Octavius Spence."

Victor ascended to the platform once more with unruffled composure. Then, to the contempt of the three agnostics he proceeded to corral the prize for neatness, the prize for Bible study, and the prize for the best examination. The pile of books which he clutched proudly under his arm grew to unwieldy proportions. Beany leaned forward and touched him on the shoulder.

"You're a good little boy," he whispered, "an'

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this afternoon you c'n go out an' roll your doll carriage."

At this sally Gangleshanks and the Tub rocked back and forth with silent laughter. Victor scowled.

"Why don't you fellows shut up?" he asked.

"First prize for punctuality," droned Mr. Coffin.
"James Penhallow Fleming."

Beany, intent upon the enjoyment of his own joke, did not hear his name. Some little girls in the front row snickered. The room turned expectantly with the peculiar instinct which crowds have for locating individuals in their midst.

"James Penhallow Fleming," repeated Mr. Coffin, peering towards the rear rows.

The giggle spread. Even the spectators in the gallery smiled indulgently. All but Mrs. Fleming who looked in vain for her son. At the second repetition of his name he started and stared at the speaker in amazement. Then, assisted from beneath by Gangleshanks and the Tub, he rose to his feet and walked down the aisle in a daze.

Squeak, squeak, squeak, went the new shoes. To his supersensitive ear-drums the noise reverberated like thunder. He tried walking on his toes, but it made no difference. He felt himself growing red.

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The stage receded further and further away. The room became a sea of indistinct faces.

He knew that everybody was laughing at him; whispering about him. He was a joke. His feet became lumps of coal. His legs refused to swing naturally from their joints.

The steps to the stage—hundreds of them it seemed, swayed and tried to throw him at each ascent. Mr. Coffin and Mr. Swope sat behind the green-covered table laughing at him. Mr. Coffin pushed something into his hands. He didn't know what it was until later.

Then the whole terrible journey was reversed. Squeak, squeak, squeak, went the shoes. The faces continued to leer as he passed. He heard a noise like a crackling fire which he realized was applause. There was a terrible second when his foot slipped on the polished floor. Smothered laughter came to his ears through the applause. Then he was back once more with Gangleshanks and the Tub.

He did not dare to raise his eyes for a long while. Then only inch by inch. When his vision had finally encompassed the room he realized with something of a start that nobody was paying the

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slightest attention to him. Gangleshanks and the Tub were examining his prize.

Victor Octavius was returning to his seat having just captured another trophy.

"What did you get?" he asked, with the intimacy born of common experience.

"Book," said Beany shortly.

"What book?" asked Victor.

"Don't know," mumbled Beany, fumbling with his hat.

"Le's see it," Victor reached back and grabbed the book from Gangleshanks' hands.

"The Golden Treasury," he said contemptuously. "I got three of those home."

"Keep 'em," flared Beany. He seized "The Golden Treasury" and sat upon it grimly.

Gangleshanks and the Tub involuntarily moved away. They felt that he was no longer one of them. The rear row lapsed into a gloomy and morbid silence. Beany noticed the change and became more and more morose. Once Victor turned to speak to him, but he answered him so savagely that the experiment was not repeated. The exercises dragged to a close.

"And now," announced the Rev. Mr. Swope,

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"the prize winners will form behind the flag and march out of the room followed by the choir. The rest of the school will keep their seats until they have gone."

Victor was up in an instant. "Come on," he said eagerly.

Beany hesitated. "I'm not goin'," he announced. Then he realized the impossibility of escape. A number of eyes were already upon him. Rising from his seat he followed Victor dejectedly down the aisle with the whispered jeers of Gangleshanks and the Tub ringing in his ears. There were eight prize winners; Beany and Victor and six little girls. The last drop of gall had been added to his cup of bitterness.

He found himself marching beside Sarah Trumbell, age nine. The organ was playing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." He didn't even pretend to sing the words, but kept his mouth set and grim. The squeaking of his shoes drowned the sound of the portable organ and the choir. His tie flared before him like a banner.

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CHAPTER XVI

RECOVERED SELF-RESPECT

Sunday School commencement was always followed by a picnic in Lonewillow Park. The eight prize winners were crowded into a special automobile. The rest of the Sunday School followed in auto busses.

Beany was glad to get away from them for a short time. He could not have faced the promiscuity of an auto bus after that procession. He had been publicly disgraced. Never again would he be admitted to the inner circle of his former associates.

Mr. and Mrs. Fleming came out of the parish house as he was getting into the automobile. He hoped they wouldn't see him, but his mother spied him immediately.

"Beany!" she cried. "That was splendid of you. I had no idea you were going to win a prize. Aren't you glad now that I made you get to school on time?"

Then, as if to add to his humiliation, she kissed

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him right before Victor Octavius and the six little girls. Mr. Fleming hung back. He also looked rather uncomfortable and sheepish. Perhaps he had a vague understanding of what was going on in his son's mind.

"And who do you suppose is waiting at the house?" asked Mrs. Fleming.

Beany shook his head with little interest.

"Your Uncle Frank and your Aunt Kate. They came in from Chicago just after you'd left. I'm going to bring them out to the picnic grounds right after dinner."

"Oh, mother——"

"Now, that's nonsense," she interrupted. "They'll be crazy to see you and know that you're doing so splendidly. I don't think she had a very good impression of you when she was here last."

This was undoubtedly true.

"You're holding up the car," suggested Mr. Fleming.

They were off, Beany sitting in the back beside Sarah Trumbell. Victor, who was more polite, had chosen one of the folding seats in front of them. Beany was sullen and morose. He wore his cap pulled far down over one eye in an attempt to con-

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vince the passers-by that he was not one of the company but a tough character who had been placed there by a whim of fate.

Victor Octavius piled his prizes at his feet and gave evidence of aspirations to become the life of the party. It was obvious that he would receive no competition from Beany.

"Le's play that game where you see things," he suggested. "A horse counts one, an' a black cat five—you know."

Beany continued to stare glumly over the side of the car. The six little girls giggled. Then they glanced doubtfully from one to the other, anxious to play yet unwilling to ally themselves against Beany's scorn. Victor Octavius turned around to see what was the matter.

"Aren't you going to play?" he asked.

"Play yourself," snapped Beany. This caused more giggling. Victor drew himself up with dignity.

"All right," he said. "You don't have to. We got enough without you."

He turned back to inspect the road. Beany screwed up his face into a knot and stuck out his tongue derisively. With this stroke he won the undisputed leadership of the party. Sarah Trumbell

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nestled closer to him. Beany moved as far away as the upholstery would permit, but Sarah was a modern Juliet. She followed without hesitation.

"I don't like him," she whispered, looking up into his face and indicating Victor.

Beany did not consider an answer necessary. He resumed his whistling and stared moodily at the countryside.

"I like you," went on Sarah. Frankness was one of her most engaging qualities.

"Rats," he said finally, and did not open his mouth again until they had arrived at the park.

The rest of the school drew up a few minutes later. They descended from the busses, howling and shouting. Beany sat down with his back against a tree and watched their antics with gloomy indifference. He was not allowed to remain in obscurity for long. Gangleshanks stood beside him.

"Gee whiz, you oughtn't to sit on th' ground like that. You'll get all dirty. You don't catch Victor gettin' dirty."

"Shut up."

"Where's your prize?"

Beany's only answer was to lash out with his foot.

"Look out what you're doin'!" cried the tor-

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mentor jumping out of range. "Why don't you go an' play with Victor an' the other little girls?"

He rushed away, expecting pursuit. But Beany allowed the insult to pass unchallenged. His spirit was broken. Through no fault of his own he had become an obnoxious object to all desirable people. He was beginning to be obnoxious to himself. Waves of self-pity swept over him.

He remained seated, turning over these gloomy thoughts. The uproar of the picnic continued. Gangleshanks and the Tub stood a short distance away looking at him, and whispering. Unable to stand it any longer he walked towards them defiantly.

"Don't get so funny," he warned.

"Listen to the prize scholar," chirped Gangleshanks, backing towards a tree.

"I'll scholar you if you don't shut up. I'll——"

"Boys, boys!" It was Mr. Coffin speaking.
"Don't you hear Miss Marcy?"

They listened unwillingly. Miss Marcy had more unwelcome ideas than any teacher in the Sunday School. She stood at the head of the table, the little girls grouped behind her.

"When I blow this whistle," she said, "each little boy will choose a little girl for his partner. He will

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then find a place for her to sit and bring her luncheon to her."

At this announcement the little boys chivalrously uttered a deep and audible groan.

"Le's stay in the back," whispered Gangleshanks. "Maybe there won't be enough girls to go round."

Miss Marcy blew her whistle. The boys, after a moment of hesitation, were overcome by the spirit of competition. There was a wild scramble. The picnic resolved itself into a kicking, screaming mob. Gradually the males and the females were weeded out and set aside in pairs.

When the dust of battle had settled there was nobody left but Sarah Trumbell. She stood alone behind Miss Marcy obviously on the point of tears. Beany, Gangleshanks and the Tub, having buried their own animosities in a common cause, watched the fracas with interested but aloof eyes.

Miss Marcy glanced in their direction, then seized the neglected Sarah with a determined look.

"Didn't anybody choose you?" she asked.

Sarah shook her head mournfully.

"Come with me."

Sarah followed with more willingness than maiden modesty prescribed. As they approached, the trio

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turned and began to walk rapidly away, suddenly mindful of an important engagement in another quarter.

“James Fleming.”

There was no mistaking the name. Beany stopped. Gangleshanks and the Tub, feeling that the noose was about to fall elsewhere, turned and took up positions behind him.

“James, choose Sarah Trumbell for a partner,” said Miss Marcy with an icy smile which discouraged argument. “Find her a seat somewhere and bring her something to eat.” Then feeling that this was a bit bald she patted them on the shoulders and said: “Two little prize winners.”

“Come.” Beany’s face was crimson with indignation. He stalked away followed by the beaming Sarah. Over his shoulder he saw Gangleshanks and the Tub, their hands over their mouths, bent double behind Miss Marcy’s back.

“Sit down there,” commanded Beany sternly, indicating a bare spot of earth at the foot of a tree. Sarah still labored under the conviction that she was in the presence of the world’s most famous humorist. She looked up in his face and laughed, delighted at his wit.

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"I'll get your food," he muttered between his teeth. Turning on his heels he plunged into the seething mass about the table.

He emerged, his collar unbuttoned, but both hands filled with sandwiches. These he half placed, half dropped, into Sarah's lap. From his pocket he produced four hard-boiled eggs somewhat mashed in the recent conflict. From within his blouse two bananas.

"There!" he exclaimed, as he placed these articles on the ground beside her. "I guess that ought to be enough for anybody."

So saying he turned and stalked away, never to return.

"The two little prize winners," mocked Gangleshanks from a safe distance.

'Oh, shut up!' Beany turned and sought seclusion among the struggling gourmands about the table.

The afternoon wore on, a dreary affair. Beany kept carefully away from Gangleshanks and the Tub. And the more he held himself aloof the more he felt that he was an outcast. He bitterly resented the system which had forced this condition upon him. Before the afternoon was over he determined

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to show Mr. Coffin, Miss Marcy and the whole school that their judgment was founded upon sand.

He walked moodily about the park trying to think up some dark deed which would brand him as a criminal. The noise about the tables subsided, then died away. Everyone had disappeared except a few teachers who remained to pick up the debris. The noise of a steam piano came to his ears. He saw a faint flash of color through the trees. Then he remembered the merry-go-round. Mr. Coffin always hired it for the Sunday School.

They were all over there enjoying themselves without a thought for him. They didn't want him. If he appeared they would laugh.

Let them laugh! He drove his hands deep into his trouser pockets and walked defiantly in the direction of the music.

The merry-go-round was in full swing. A group of boys and girls were waiting to take their turn when it should stop. Beany swaggered past them, ran a few steps beside the whirling platform, and jumped lightly aboard.

Disdaining the plunging horses, he leaned carelessly against a pole, occasionally reaching down to

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drag his foot through the dust. The music stopped. Beany jumped off and into Miss Marcy's arms.

"James Fleming, you know better than to jump on and off like that!"

"Oh, I'm not going to hurt myself," he cried.

"I don't want any child to jump on or off that machine while it's in motion," announced Miss Marcy in a loud voice. "If anybody disobeys that rule they won't be allowed to ride again."

The merry-go-round stopped. New passengers clambered aboard. Beany watched them take their places glumly. Never, he swore solemnly to himself, would he be prevailed upon to attend such an effeminate function again.

The music started. The horses went whirling past him, rising and falling like the breathing of some strange monster. Beany watched them with a scowl. Then taking a short run he leaped aboard and stood nonchalantly with one arm crooked about the post. No one paid any attention to him. He stood there for a moment, then jumped off to face Miss Marcy once more.

"I don't want to see you get on the merry-go-round again this afternoon," she said. "We'll see if children are going to be allowed to disobey like

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that. Instead of being a good example to the school you teach them to do wrong."

"I don' wanna be a good example." Beany flung himself away. He heard Miss Marcy call after him, but pretended not to hear. Above the blatant tones of the steam piano rose the sound of laughter. He was torn by a desire to run away from it all, and by a contrary impulse to stay and throw mud at the merry-go-round.

A few feet away was a stand-pipe with a hose attached. He walked over to it and turning on the water applied his mouth to the nozzle.

"Don't drink out of that thing!" exclaimed a voice behind him.

It was Victor Octavius. He was regarding Beany earnestly through his shell-rimmed glasses.

"What's it to you?" Beany removed the nozzle and returned the stare with venom.

"It's full of bugs."

"So're you," replied Beany tersely and applied his mouth to the nozzle once more.

"Don't get fresh."

"Don't you get fresh."

"You think you're pretty smart, don't you?"

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"If I wasn't smarter than you I wouldn't be very smart."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so."

"It is, eh?"

"Yes it is."

They stood glaring at one another. Beany's thumb slowly covered the end of the hose and a fine stream of water, escaping under pressure, struck Victor Octavius in the face.

"Did you mean to do that?"

"Mean to do what?"

"Hit me with that water. You know what I mean."

"Maybe I did an' maybe I didn't."

"Well, you better not do it again."

"Why not?"

"'Cause you better not, that's all."

Another stream of water, springing from under Beany's thumb, left a dark stain on Octavius' grey suit.

"Cut that out."

"Who for?"

"Never mind. Just cut it out."

"Supposin' I don't."

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"I'll make you."

"Supposin' you can't."

"'S' all right. Cut it out."

For the third time the liquid challenge came, clear and unmistakable. Victor Octavius dashed his tortoise-shell glasses to the ground and closed. As he did so Beany reached down and turned on the spigot as far as it would go.

They grappled, the hose pressed between them. A geyser of water shot into the air. Back and forth they fought, the hose describing spirals and figure-eights against the sky. Then sweeping suddenly downward it played its full force on the revolving merry-go-round.

Effect followed cause instantaneously. Above the wailing of the steam piano rose the howls of the picnickers. The merry-go-round came to a stop.

They lost their grip on the hose and rolled over and over on the ground biting, kicking and punching. Cries for mercy issued from the bruised lips of Victor Octavius. But Beany was in no mood for mercy. He continued to pound and kick until a heavy hand was laid on his collar and he was yanked violently to his feet. Mr. Coffin glowered above him.

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"What——" he began.

Still less was Beany interested in academic questions. Drawing back his foot he kicked Mr. Coffin with all his strength on the shin-bone. Mr. Coffin groaned and relaxed his grip. Beany broke away and plunging through the awe-struck crowd, disappeared down the road.

Round the first bend he met Gangleshanks and the Tub returning, heavy laden, from a soda fountain at the entrance to the grounds.

"Gee whiz, here comes the little prize winner!" cried Gangleshanks unwisely. Then, as they took in Beany's condition, they stopped.

But Gangleshanks had said enough to instill fresh murder in Beany's heart. The sounds of pursuit reached his ears.

"All right, prize that," he shouted. Stopping suddenly he planted his second well-aimed kick on a human shin, accompanied by a blow on Gangleshanks' chest which sent him reeling and astonished into the shrubbery.

The Tub prepared for rapid movement, but was too slow. Like a fury Beany was upon him with lowered head. The Tub received the impact with a dreadful grunt and sat down heavily, while Beany

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stepped on and over his prostrate body and continued his flight. He could hear the sound of running feet close behind him.

While these revolutionary events were taking place Mr. and Mrs. Fleming and their guests sped comfortably over the concrete road towards Lone-willow Park. Mrs. Fleming was filled with complacency over the events of the day. It was pleasant to be able to point out some concrete accomplishment of her son's on the first day of her sister's visit. It conveyed the impression that such occurrences were frequent.

"This is the park where they have the picnic," said Mr. Fleming, turning off the main road.

"I just can't wait to see Jimmy—or Beany rather. I suppose I must get used to calling him Beany. He must be perfectly adorable from what you say. Of course I admire you so for having brought him up the way you have. So many of these modern children are quite irresponsible and undisciplined. It's a relief to see one with a few of the old ideals."

Thus chattered Mrs. Manning. They swung sharply round a curve. There was a squeal of brakes. The car stopped with a jolt. A small form

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had come bursting round the corner and ran squarely into the fender. It glared at them over the radiator-cap with startled, horrified eyes. Mrs. Fleming gave a little cry.

"Beany!"

A different Beany, however, from the one whose doubtful triumph she had witnessed that morning. His clothes were soaked. He was splashed with mud from head to foot. From his nose ran a trickle of blood which had smeared his face and collar.

Then, round the corner, came Mr. Coffin followed by Gangleshanks and the Tub. The remainder of the delighted Sunday School trailed behind.

As he stood looking over the hood of the automobile into his father's eyes Beany knew that the game was up. But at this dreadful moment there came to him one fortifying thought which caused him to meet his doom with head high and lips firm. Never again could anybody call him a sis.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE CALL OF THE WILD

It was a blistering June afternoon. The street was deserted. The world had crawled into the shade momentarily to take refuge from the sun. Beany and Gangleshanks turned listlessly in at the Tub's driveway. They had both indulged in three consecutive ice cream sodas at Mrs. McGruder's and felt rather depressed in consequence.

It was also the first day of summer vacation and as yet nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Both believed it to be their duty to fill every moment of liberty with action. To do nothing was to admit that school had a definite place in their lives.

In the rear of the yard, almost concealed from view by a large bush, stood a tent. Underneath its shelter reclined Alexander Mayo Hemingway. Beads of perspiration rolled unhindered down his chubby face. A thick sporting goods catalogue lay open at his elbow. Beany and Gangleshanks crawled

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into the tent and lay down on their stomachs beside him.

This tent had been presented to the Tub on the occasion of his eleventh birthday by his father. The latter planned to borrow it for a fishing trip later in the season and in this way to reduce the high cost of living by one purchase. Beany and Gangleshanks had each assumed part ownership in the gift as a matter of course. Before they had finished putting it up they referred to it as "our tent." Indeed, as time went on, the Tub's interest became more and more problematical. They had even considered removing it from the Hemingway yard to some more convenient place.

The tent had proved a lifesaver by helping to pass the last terrible week before school closed. Around it Beany had invented a game known as "Indians," in which the Tub impersonated a lonely white trapper while Beany and Gangleshanks took the part of savage aborigines.

This game had for its object the extermination of trappers, with the result that the Hemingway laundress had already given notice.

"Le's play Indian," suggested Beany, plucking a good chewing blade of grass. He was heartily sick

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of the game after a week of repetition but there appeared to be nothing better to do.

"No," said the Tub unexpectedly, "I don' wan'a." Beany and Gangleshanks looked at him with disapproval. They felt that this savored of radicalism.

"I wan'a look at this bu-bu-bu-book."

They peered curiously over his shoulder at the catalogue. "Where'd you get that?"

"Came with the tent." The Tub continued to turn the pages. The book contained numerous cuts of those collapsible conveniences which make life in the woods a perilous adventure. There were also fishing poles, guns, cooking utensils, tents, sleeping bags and a hundred other articles suggestive of a more interesting life than their present one.

They finished the catalogue, admired the lonely moose which gazed at them from the cover, then succumbed to the heat, more discontented than before. Beany watched the shadow of a fly crawling across the outside of the tent. Life bored him. He felt this to be a very bad beginning to a summer vacation.

At that moment the sound of gravel being crunched under wheels came to their ears. Beany, on his hands and knees, peered around the bush.

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"It's Mr. Javers," he said, standing up. "Le's talk to him."

Since their earliest recollections Mr. Javers had dispensed fresh butter and eggs to Walnut street. He rode about in a yellow truck on the side of which was painted in foot-high letters, "Javers' Model Farm." Although none had ever seen the farm there was a general impression, created no doubt by Mr. Javers' prices, that it was an exceptionally model affair.

Among other qualities Mr. Javers was deaf. Beany had discovered this one afternoon upon hearing Hannah call him "a red-faced old fool"; a remark caused by his having left a good portion of the Model Farm on her kitchen floor. Instead of defending himself he had merely beamed and replied, "Yes, indeed."

After several cautious experiments Beany established the fact that Mr. Javers could be counted upon to make the same reply to any remark whatsoever. Once assured of this nothing gave them keener pleasure than to follow him about, inquiring gravely if he were not a funny-looking old monkey, or if it were true that his brains consisted principally of cheese. To all their questions Mr. Javers would

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smile agreeably and reply, "Yes, indeed." Whereupon they would retire to roll on the grass with uncontrollable laughter.

Mr. Javers had left a crock of butter and a carton of eggs at the back door and was about to depart when the boys approached him.

"Gooday," he remarked pleasantly.

"Hello, Mr. Shavers. How're all th' li'l shavers?" inquired Beany politely.

At this burst of wit the Tub was forced to retire behind the truck where he made a great show of stuffing a veteran handkerchief into his mouth.

"Pretty cold day, isn't it?" asked Gangleshanks.

"Yes, indeed." Mr. Javers removed his old straw hat to wipe the perspiration from his crimson forehead. At this the three jokers, overcome by their own cleverness, took to their heels and disappeared around the back porch. Mr. Javers, after looking about to see that there were no bricks under the wheels of his truck or that it was not tied to a clothes pole, shook his head with a puzzled air and drove away.

Although the resulting hilarity was as noisy as usual Beany did not feel in the mood for this sort of thing. When Mr. Javers had gone and there

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was no longer any chance of being caught by anyone, he subsided suddenly. Gangleshanks and the Tub, after several half-hearted attempts to revive interest, also lapsed into silence. They lay on the grass where they had thrown themselves, watching the shadow of the house creep across the lawn. The germ of an idea had entered Beany's mind.

"I know what le's do," he said, sitting up. "Le's go camping."

They looked at him curiously, expecting him to propose some new game. "Wha' d'ya mean?" asked Gangleshanks finally.

"Take our tent an' go out in th' woods somewhere."

"Yaw, who do you s'pose is goin' t' let you do that?"

"Why not? I guess I c'n go campin' if I want."

"Yu-yu-yes, you can."

"Sure we can." Gangleshanks was irritated by the Tub's acknowledgment of superior authority. "Patch Parsons went last summer. He isn't any older than us fellas. I guess if he can go we can."

"I *know* I can go," said Beany with an easy air. "It's just up to you fellas."

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"I c'n go all right. All I got to do's ask father. He'll le'me."

"Bu-bu-bu-bet you can't," said the Tub stubbornly.

"Bet we can," replied Beany hotly. "Golly day, wha'd they give us the tent for if they didn't expect us t' use it. I guess I wouldn't be tied to an apron string the way you are, Tub. Wha' do you say, Gangleshanks?"

"Alexander!" It was Mrs. Hemingway's voice calling from the back porch.

"Run to your mama, li'l boy," said Beany, assuming the careless attitude of a free lance.

"Yes, mother." The Tub wriggled round so that he could see the speaker.

"Is James Fleming there?"

"Yes'm." Beany sat up slowly.

"James, your mother just called up. She wants you to come right home and get ready for supper."

"Well, Beany," said Mr. Fleming, glancing across the table at his son. "Another year of school ended, eh?"

"Yes, sir." Beany used the respectful tone which presaged a request.

"Well, you haven't done so badly this year," said

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Mr. Fleming tolerantly. He always talked like this at the end of a school term. It might have embarrassed him to explain just what he referred to. Perhaps he meant to express relief that Beany had not been expelled or had not accidentally killed anyone. "I wish you weren't going to be hanging around here all summer, though." He continued to look thoughtfully at his son. "I think another year I'll send you to one of these boys' camps."

"That's what I ought to do." Beany lost no time putting his foot in the door of opportunity. "This town's an awful place for a fella t' hang around in. He ought t' be out somewhere gettin' hard."

Mr. Fleming had an uneasy feeling that he was about to be trapped. "You're right," he agreed incautiously. "There's nothing like a primitive out-of-door life for a boy—or a man either for that matter."

"Father, me an' Gangleshanks an' th' Tub want to go campin'." Beany took a long breath and hurried on as he saw his father's mouth open in protest. "You see th' Tub's father is crazy about campin' an' all that kind o' thing. An' he's bought th' Tub a tent. An' we got everythin' we need. An' if we stay in town all th' time we're goin' t' get

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weaker an' weaker an' there's no tellin' what'll happen to us."

"Nonsense!" snorted Mr. Fleming, as Beany paused to take in a fresh supply of air. "Nonsense! You three kids go off camping by yourselves! I wouldn't hear of it. I bet Hemingway and Braceworth won't let their boys go on any such wild goose chase as that either."

"Oh, but they will, father. They're crazy t' have 'em go." Beany was not a liar. He was an enthusiast. "They're crazy t' have 'em go an' they want me t' go with 'em. Mr. Hemingway's so crazy t' have the Tub go he's given us a tent. An' we got everything else we need. An' if we stay in town——"

"But who'd do your cooking?" asked Mr. Fleming, interrupting the argument as it came round the second time. "And who'd take care of you if you got sick? Why, it's perfect nonsense I tell you."

"Golly day, father, don't you think we know how to do *anything*? We can cook as well as anybody an' who's goin' t' get sick? The minute a fella goes away everybody thinks he's goin' t' die right away. I wouldn't be surprised if we got sick stayin' around here, though. That's what makes a fella sick. Hangin' round here. You said so yourself."

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Beany turned to his mother who had carefully kept out of the argument. "Why couldn't we, mother? Just go campin' for a few days? It wouldn't hurt us. Golly day."

"Where were you going to camp, Beany?" There was an amused expression in Mrs. Fleming's eyes, but her tone was serious.

"Why just out in the country, mother. You don't have to go up to th' North *Pole* t' go campin', you know. We'd just take our bikes and ride out in th' country 'til we found a good place. Can't we, mother?"

"I don't know, Beany. It depends on what your father says." Mrs. Fleming had learned to be non-committal. Beany, however, long practiced in reading tones and expressions, knew that he had gained an ally. Immediately after the meal he met Gangleshanks outside.

"Everythin's all right," he said, with sublime confidence. "How about you?"

"Fine," replied Gangleshanks, who had gone through the same kind of a battle a few moments before and was no more sure of the outcome than Beany. "Now all we got t' do is get our stuff together."

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At that very moment Mrs. Fleming was pleading her son's cause.

"All right," said Mr. Fleming, finally, in a martyred voice. "All right. Let the boy go. He's your son, I suppose, just as much as mine. If you don't care what becomes of him I don't see why I should. My summer is spoiled, but that doesn't matter. I assure you I shan't sleep a wink while he's gone. If that doesn't count for anything let the boy go."

Mrs. Fleming, who knew her husband better than he knew himself, told Beany that night that it was all fixed up.

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CHAPTER XVIII

INTO THE HEART OF THE UNKNOWN

Beany stood in the middle of his bedroom floor surrounded by a strange variety of objects.

"Come on," he said to Gangleshanks, who was lying on the bed. "Le's get this stuff checked up." Gangleshanks wet the business end of a pencil stub and held it poised over a piece of paper which lay beside him on the bed. "One axe." Beany held up a small hatchet appropriated from the Tub's tool-chest. "One waterproof matchsafe."

"We ought to have more'n one," interrupted Gangleshanks. "If we ever lost that an' got our matches wet we'd be up against it, I tell you."

"Oh, we could manage."

"How so, I'd like to know? How're you goin' to light a fire if your matches is all wet?"

"I guess you never heard o' makin' a fire with two sticks?"

"Sure I have. *You* can't do it though."

"Can too."

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"Le's see you."

"I s'pose you'd want me to light a fire right here in th' house. That's about all th' sense you got. Golly day! I guess——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of his mother. "Here's a little bottle of aspirin in case anyone catches cold," she said, placing a small package on the table.

"Oh, mother!" Beany had caught sight of Gangleshanks who, with his hand over his mouth, was going through the pantomime of hearty laughter behind that lady's back. "Golly day, you'd think we were all goin' out to get killed somewherees instead of just goin' campin'. All you think of is somebody gettin' sick or cuttin' off his head or breakin' his neck. Nothin's goin' t' happen to us, mother."

Mrs. Fleming looked unconvinced. "I don't know," she said. "If I told your father what I *really* think he'd never let you go. What does *your* mother think of all this, Gangleshanks?"

"Oh, she thinks it's fine," replied Gangleshanks, who was only allowed to go because it was understood that the Flemings and Hemingways endorsed the scheme so heartily.

"Well, I shall be worried to death till you come

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back. You see, if anything happened I would have to take all the blame. You *must* promise to be careful."

"Of course we will, mother. Golly day, there isn't anything to be careful about, though. There's more danger right here home, like fallin' down stairs or gettin' run over."

"Or catchin' measles an' different diseases," suggested Gangleshanks politely, feeling that Beany should have some support.

Mrs. Fleming left them. "Golly day!" exclaimed Beany in a relieved voice as the door shut behind her. "Le's go ahead or we'll never get finished. One compass."

"Everybody ought t' have a compass," observed Gangleshanks thoughtfully. "How'd you find your way if you was lost without a compass?"

"The book tells how. You just take your watch an' point it at the sun someway an' there's a way of tellin' from there which is north."

"You don't want t' forget t' take that book."

"I guess not. It 'ud be all up with us if we forgot this ol' book." From a small bookcase he took a volume entitled "The Camper's Guide," and placed it on the bed beside Gangleshanks.

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"Wha'd you do with the Red Cross outfit?" asked Gangleshanks. "You haven't forgot that, have you?"

"You bet not." Beany pulled a tin box from under the bed. "I got it under here special so's I wouldn't forget it."

"I guess if anybody gets hurt we'll be glad we had that along. You can't tell what a fella might do out in th' woods like that. He might break his leg or his arm or chop off his foot as easy as anything."

"I should say he could. You wouldn't catch me goin' into th' woods without my Red Cross outfit." Beany placed the tin box beside "The Camper's Guide" and began to examine its contents.

"Think you got enough bandages?" asked Gangleshanks, sitting up to oversee this operation. "If a fella broke his leg or anything it 'ud take an awful lot o' bandages."

"That shows all you know about it. You don't put on bandages when a fella breaks his leg. You put a splinter in it. It's all in the book." He closed the medical supplies to prevent further argument. "Now there's nothin' left to do but get these bags filled with food."

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"The Camper's Guide" was very definite on the subject of food. It prescribed for a party of four, flour, cornmeal, rice, cornstarch, coffee, raisins and baking powder in scientifically calculated amounts. Gangleshanks read the list dubiously.

"That ol' list may be all right, but I wish there was somethin' a fella could eat if he got hungry."

"Mother's puttin' in some sardines an' stuff," admitted Beany. Gangleshanks looked relieved.

They met in front of Beany's house the following morning after numerous delays. Just outside the gate stood an express wagon piled high with their camping outfit. Three lengths of clothesline were fastened to the front. The loose ends were to be tied to their bicycles. This was Beany's invention and he was not modest in his opinion of it.

Mrs. Fleming was on hand to see them off. The various other parents had been dissuaded from obtaining what they considered a last earthly glimpse of their sons.

"Are you sure you have everything now?" she asked for the fortieth time.

"Oh, *mother!* Of course we have. Golly day, if we don't get goin' we'll never get started. Come on, Tub. Hitch your bike on. Hurry up, can't

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you, Gangleshanks." He had a sinking feeling that he was about to receive some public advice on the subject of hygiene and hoped, by injecting enough confusion into the start, to divert his mother's thoughts. No such luck, however.

"Now, Beany," she said. "Do remember one thing. If you get your feet wet change your shoes and stockings right away and rub your feet with a dry towel."

"Oh, mother!" He gave her an entreating glance which she analyzed as homesickness.

"I wish you weren't going," she said, attempting to embrace his wriggling body. "Do be careful, won't you? And don't fool around with axes. And if it gets cold at night I put in a suit of heavy underwear and——"

"Good-by, mother!" cried the boy Boone in desperation. "Come on, you fellas. Golly day, we'll never get anywhere if we don't get goin'."

They made one or two false starts owing to the fact that the three bicycles refused to reach the end of the tow ropes at the same moment. Then they were off, the express wagon rattling and slewing along the pavement behind them. Mrs. Fleming watched them disappear with an anxious face.

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The wheels of their bicycles splashed through a small puddle left by a shower of the previous night. "Gee whizz, I hope you didn't get your feet wet," exclaimed Gangleshanks with a great show of concern.

"Oh, shut up."

"Don't you think you bu-bu-bu-better change your shoes?" asked the Tub. Beany looked at him with surprise. He began to fear that it had been a mistake to let him come on this party. He was already beginning to act with a freshness which might have been expected.

"You better shut up," he warned, "or you'll wish you was dead when we stop."

The Tub's flushed face indicated that he might have such a desire long before that time. "Lu-lu-lord, this thing's heavy," he complained.

Gangleshanks agreed. "Course it is. It's full o' Beany's underclothes."

"I'll underclothes you." They continued to pedal grimly ahead for at least ten minutes.

"Where in Sam Hill are we goin'?" asked Gangleshanks finally.

The answer was vague. "Just out in th' country." Beany wished he had not been so mysterious about

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their destination. "Just keep on goin' 'til it gets wild." They relapsed into silence once more.

At last the houses grew smaller, the vacant lots more numerous and the pavement more bumpy. Then the asphalt ended and they found themselves on a macadam road considerably in need of repair. A large hole loomed up in front of them. Beany swung to the left, Gangleshanks and the Tub to the right. Torn by conflicting emotions the express wagon stopped abruptly.

"Gee whizz, what're you trying t' do?" asked Gangleshanks, hopping on one foot. "Break a fella's neck?"

"It's all right about *my* neck of course. As long's *your* neck's all right I c'n ride into the hole an' break mine. *That's* all right." They prepared to get under way once more. All this manual labor was beginning to pall on the Tub.

"Gu-gu-gu-gosh, it's pretty wild around *here*," he remarked suggestively, looking about at the cultivated fields which lined the road on both sides. Beany gazed at him disdainfully.

"Wild!" he exclaimed. "Wild! Why, you don't know what *wild* is. Why, before we get through

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it'll be so wild you won't see a man f'r days an' days."

"Where's that?" asked the Tub.

"You'll see when you get there."

Gangleshanks said nothing. Beany, fearing that he might be about to side with the Tub, fired the surest shot in his locker. "The Tub thinks this is wild," he sneered.

"Gee whizz, he don't know what wild is." Gangleshanks was instantly converted. "We'll show him before we get through, eh Beans?"

"You bet," agreed the Beans cheerfully. They started off once more.

The country through which they were passing had undoubtedly been wild at one time. This, however, was a hundred years or more before Beany decided to plunge into its fastnesses. At present it rolled away in cultivated smugness as far as the eye could see. Here and there small patches of timber had been left standing. As a camping ground, however, it compared unfavorably with Central Park, New York.

They reached the foot of a long grade and slowed up. They stood on the pedals. Gravity won, and they came to a stop.

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"Gee whizz, it's hot." Gangleshanks dismounted and wiped his face with his sleeve. "Where is this darn ol' place o' yours, Beany?"

"Tain't *my* darn ol' place. It's yours as much as 'tis mine."

"Well, lu-lu-lu-le's get there pretty soon." The Tub was rapidly losing weight.

"Get *where?*" cried Beany, exasperated. "You all look at me an' say '*there*' as if I knew where '*there*' was. Golly day, I don' know where '*there*' is any more than you." He was beginning to suffer the fate of all promoters who never receive any credit for an idea until it promises to be a failure.

"You were doin' all th' talkin'. Gee whizz, you talk more about things you don't know anything about than any fella I ever saw."

"I never talked about it."

"You did so. Just a li'l while ago you were tellin' about all th' wild places you knew."

"Well, if you'd only keep goin' instead o' standin' here chewin' all day we might get there."

They toiled up the dusty hill. By the time they reached the top no conservative insurance company would have guaranteed Beany's life. Then, as they saw the grade sloping away before them in a long

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descent of almost a mile, they took heart once more.

Mounting, they started to coast. For the first time the expedition slipped smoothly along without exertion. The express wagon, however, with its heavy load, started to overtake them.

"We got t' go faster," shouted Beany, looking over his shoulder. They began to pedal. Faster and faster they flew until the express wagon was cavorting behind them like a young lamb. A knife popped out unnoticed. A can joined it. A wake of small objects sprang up in their rear. Then, to their dismay, a sign loomed up before them. "DE-TOUR ROAD CLOSED." This was confirmed by two crossed planks barring the main road.

Beany tried to make the turn. Gangleshanks kept on straight ahead. The Tub, who was in the middle, suffered the consequences. When his two companions picked themselves out of opposite ditches and discovered to their surprise that there were no broken bones he was sitting in the road whimpering softly. His face was scratched, his clothes were torn and he was even dirtier than before. The express wagon rested upon his lap.

"Golly day, don't be a darn *baby* about it." Having escaped scot-free himself, Beany was inclined to

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use the affair as a demonstration of his indifference to danger.

"No," agreed the equally fortunate Gangleshanks. "You got to take a few knocks when you're out campin' like this."

The Tub stated very distinctly that he did not wish to go out camping.

"What's the sense in sayin' you don't want t' go out campin' when you're *out*. You're campin' now, so it's no good not to wan'a."

This logic failed to appeal to the Tub. "I wan'a go home."

"Well, you can't go home 'cause your bike's busted," said Beany with finality. "Golly day, I never saw such a kid."

The Tub ceased to whine and examined his wheel. The handlebars looked like the horns of a Rocky Mountain sheep. At the sight he set up a howl.

"Look here," said Beany, unable to bear this any longer. "If you don't quit actin' like a two-year-ol' kid we'll lay you right down in the road an' make you wish you was dead."

The Tub opened one eye far enough to make sure that this threat was genuine, whereupon he subsided into sullen silence.

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CHAPTER XIX

BIG GAME

Beany and Gangleshanks looked about. They had almost reached the foot of the hill. Just below the road passed through a wood. The conformation of the ground made it impossible to tell how large an area this covered. On their left was a field of uncut hay, bordered near the edge of the woods by a small stream.

"Golly day!" exclaimed Beany admiringly. "This is a wild place."

"You bet it is." Gangleshanks would have pronounced Walnut street wild rather than drag the express wagon another foot. "It's lucky we fell off just where we did."

The Tub advanced some doubts on this last point, but was ignored. They lifted the remains of the camping outfit over the fence and piled them near the stream. The bicycles were leaned against the fence inside the field. The Tub's bicycle was the

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pride of his heart and he now proceeded to describe his sense of loss in great detail.

"Golly day, who cares about your ol' wheel," said Gangleshanks finally. The Tub's troubles were getting on his nerves. "Le's get this tent up."

While Beany and Gangleshanks struggled with the tent the Tub rummaged among their goods. He passed over the bags containing the flour, rice and cornmeal, finally emerging with a loaf of bread and several cans of sardines. "Le's eat," he suggested hopefully.

Beany looked at him with pity. "Eat!" he exclaimed. "Eat! You're a fine camper you are. Why you haven't even got your fire goin' yet."

"Wha-wha-what do you wan' a fire for?" The question was excusable, for there was nothing which they knew how to cook and the sun was blistering the backs of their necks.

"Golly day, I guess you never been campin' before."

"Neither've you."

Beany waived this remark as unworthy of answer. At this moment Gangleshanks crawled out from under the tent. "The Tub wants to eat before we get a fire goin'," he said.

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"Gee whizz!" exclaimed that worthy disdainfully, not having the least idea why anyone should want a fire on such a day.

"I'll take the axe," said Beany, "an' cut th' big stuff. You an' th' Tub can pick up the li'lle stuff." Fearing an argument he pulled the hatchet from under a pile of cooking utensils and walked away.

Picking out a large white birch near the edge of the woods Beany took a few preliminary hacks. The hatchet, never a dangerous tool, scratched the bark slightly.

"That's a little big," he muttered apologetically to himself and turned his attention to a small sapling. The result was much the same as if he had pounded on the top of a heavy steel spring with a tack hammer. Drops of perspiration spattered the leaves at his feet.

He looked up. Gangleshanks and the Tub were busy picking up dead branches. A few feet away lay a young birch broken by the weight of a larger tree which had fallen against it. It was only attached to its roots by a few splinters. Beany managed to hack through these and dragged the tree a few feet into the open.

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"Come on, you fellas, an' gi' me a han'," he called. They surveyed his work with admiration.

"Gu-gu-gosh, you cut that quick," said the Tub.

"It don't take any time if you know how."

Gangleshanks, however, more cynical, was examining the splintered base. "You didn't cut that!"

Something in his tone irritated Beany. "How do you think I got it down? Broke it off?"

"You found it," declared Gangleshanks decidedly.

A great anger rose in Beany's breast. He had been accused of lying. He felt that his honor was in question.

"I guess I ought to know if I cut it or not," he almost shouted.

"Bet you didn't."

"How much you bet?" Beany plunged his hand into his pocket threatening to draw out huge sums.

"Won't bet anything. Just bet you didn't," said Gangleshanks inconsistently. "It's dead."

"Course it's dead. You expect it's goin' t' live after it's cut?"

"Le's eat," suggested the Tub once more with rare, although unconscious, diplomacy. His interior began to feel like a sucked egg.

They built their fire near the brook and dragged

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the birch across the top. With the aid of a newspaper and three boxes of matches the pile was finally lit. Beany gazed at his handiwork admiringly. "There," he said. "Now I guess we're most ready to eat."

The dry wood burned fiercely. They sat down as near the fire as possible and prepared to make merry on sardines and bread. The air about them quivered with heat. A transatlantic stoker would have found it unbearable. They held their ground, however, without a murmur. Such is art.

Having disposed of a colorless meal they drank deeply from the brook and then lay down to consider their next move. All three had an uncomfortable picnic sensation of being bloated with food and yet still hungry. It was a lazy afternoon. They spent a long time staring blankly at the hot sky.

Gradually the sun began to approach the tops of the trees. "We got to get things in shape f'r supper pretty soon," said Gangleshanks, breaking the long silence.

"You bet," agreed Beany without moving. The Tub said nothing. His body had gradually relaxed and through his scratched nose emerged quiet sleeping noises.

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Beany had good reasons for wishing to put off the preparation of supper as long as possible. At his insistence they had adhered strictly to the list of food supplies prescribed by "The Camper's Guide." Flour, rice and cornmeal had sounded very professional in Walnut street. Now that the time was coming when they must be transformed into something edible he wished that he had taken his mother's advice and laid in a larger stock of more amateurish but less mysterious foods.

He rose to his feet and stretched. "I'm not sure I want any supper," he said. Then suddenly he began to shout and wave his arms. Gangleshanks, who was lying in the long grass and could see little but the sky, thought that the heat might have affected him and looked on with interest.

"Hi, you darn fool. Get out o' there!"

Gangleshanks sat up to investigate. The Tub didn't stir.

A cow was placidly nosing over their food supply. Gangleshanks jumped up and hurled a stone at the intruder. Then, arming themselves from the bottom of the brook, they proceeded to avenge the trespass.

The cow lumbered away a short distance, then

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turned to look at them reproachfully. Gangleshanks drew back his hand to throw another stone. Beany seized his arm.

"Don't do that," he said. "I got an idear."

The arm was lowered unwillingly. "What idear?"

"Le's milk it."

Gangleshanks looked as if he doubted his ears. "Milk it!" he repeated. "Milk that ol' cow! Why you couldn't milk that cow in a milyun years. First place, how do you know it's tame?"

"I'm not afraid o' that darn cow. I guess he better be tame."

"You couldn't milk a cow anyway."

"Could too."

"How could you? You never milked one in your life."

"That's all right. I've seen 'em. It just runs out of 'em. Here, boss. Here, boss." He snapped his fingers enticingly, but the cow remained firmly rooted, refusing to be fooled by such bromidic inducements. Beany gathered a handful of long grass. Holding this bait in front of him he started forward a step at a time.

"Wha'd'ya s'pose he cares f'r that li'lle bit o'

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hay?" asked Gangleshanks contemptuously. "He can eat th' whole field if he wants."

The cow stood her ground, all four feet spread out and tail rigid, until they were within a few feet. Then, with a snort and a playful flick of her heels, she turned and galloped off to a distant corner.

Beany and Gangleshanks accepted the challenge. Their primitive hunting instincts were aroused. Separating, they worked their way along converging fences. The cow waited until the net was almost closed and then ran between them and off down the field once more.

Round and round the field they went after the terrified animal, Beany and Gangleshanks in full cry. They were thoroughly delighted with this unexpected turn of events. Time after time they worked her into a corner. Then, when almost trapped, she would put down her head and dash between them once more to the security of the open field. They had no intentions of catching her. The original idea of obtaining milk was forgotten. Their one object now was pursuit.

CHAPTER XX

THE WIND AMONG THE BRANCHES

In spite of all this the sun continued on its normal course towards the horizon and finally disappeared behind the trees as if nothing was happening. By this time all three participants in the contest were in a state of frenzy. At last, after skirting the field twice, the cow turned suddenly, plunged through the brook, and disappeared into the woods on the opposite side. Beany and Gangleshanks followed.

At first the cow galloped along a faint path which wound among the trees. Then, turning off sharply, she plunged into the bushes. They traced her course by the crashing of broken branches. The woods were thick and the going slow. Judging by the noise of the chase the cow appeared to have the advantage. They scrambled down a shallow gully which lay across their course and found themselves in a clump of young alders which shot out of a dense undergrowth. Gangleshanks gave a howl of pain.

“It scratches.”

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"Of course it does," said Beany, who had been more cautious. "Golly day, you're a fine camper, you are, if you're goin' to stop every time you get a scratch. I guess the ol' cow didn't stop an holler about it, did he?"

They paused to listen. Not only did they fail to hear the cow "hollering," but even the noise of its smashing progress had ceased. The faint cry of a bird over their heads broke the silence.

"Now you gone an' lost him. Golly day, if I was such a baby I'd stay home."

"Baby! I guess if you was havin' your skin pulled off you'd say something about it." Gangleshanks was indignant.

"Well, you got t' go without a good glass o' cold milk, that's all. There's nothin' much better, either, than a glass right out o' th' cow." Beany had never personally tested milk under these conditions, but his grandmother, who repeated herself, never saw a cow without making the remark. He merely passed the information along for what it was worth.

"Look." Gangleshanks was showing little interest in the merits of fresh milk. He pointed to a fork in one of the alders. Just out of reach was a

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nest over the top of which projected three fuzzy balls.

By climbing adjoining trees they obtained a perfect view of this phenomena. The nest contained three mothy-looking birds who were protesting against life at the top of their new lungs. Angry cries from their parent floated down from somewhere above them. They watched, fascinated, until Beany discovered that it had grown almost dark.

"I guess we better be gettin' back," he said. "The Tub'll be wonderin' where we are."

"That ol' Tub! Gee whizz, I bet he'd sleep 'til we went home."

They climbed down and picked their way out of the gully. The woods became thicker and the shadows deeper.

"Funny we don't come across that path."

"It's right up ahead." Beany trudged confidently on through the gloom.

There is a fortunate tendency in every human being to consider himself immune from the daily accidents of life. Heroes are merely people in whom this trait is developed to a high degree. A twelve-year-old boy in particular, views the bunkers of fate with the disinterested eye of a god—if he

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sees them at all. Beany and Gangleshanks had gloated over the misfortunes of wretches lost in the woods. It had never occurred to them, however, that they were eligible to a similar experience. Even now they refused to believe it.

It was almost completely dark. The trunks of the smaller trees were already invisible. They worked along through the underbrush, their hands stuck out before them.

"Funny we don't come to that path," said Gangleshanks again.

He was the first to lose his sense of aloofness from mishap. It was knocked out of him by the trunk of a large tree. "Gee whizz," he exclaimed in a small, frightened voice. "I think we're lost."

"Rats!" replied Beany, with no great confidence. "How c'n you be lost? Th' woods don't go everywhere. All you got to do is to keep walkin' straight an' you got to come out somewhere."

"Yes, but don't you remember what the book says about people walkin' round in circles in the woods? Don't you remember how it says when you get lost to stay where you are till somebody finds you?"

"How's anybody goin' t' find you here, I'd like

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t' know? Besides, I guess I know if I'm walkin' in circles or not. Golly day, if you hold your arm straight out in front of you an' follow that you can't walk in circles, can you?"

Gangleshanks looked doubtful. "It don't seem's if you could. I hate t' go against th' book, though."

"Well, we'll find th' path in a minute."

They stumbled on through the darkness, tripping over fallen trunks, running into trees, scratching their faces on low-hanging branches. Finally Gangleshanks went headlong over a protruding root and hurt his hand. He began to whimper.

"I ain't goin' any further."

Beany stopped. It slowly dawned on him that they were lost. Ordinarily this discovery would have been celebrated with tears. The sound of Gangleshanks' whimpering, however, gave his pride the necessary incentive. His voice had a tremble in it, but his tone was intrepid. "Come here," he said. "It's kind o' grassy. We'll sit down an' talk it over."

Gangleshanks groped his way to his side.
"What're y' goin' t' do?"

"We're goin' t' stay here 'til mornin'."

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"I wan'a go home." Gangleshanks' whimpering had developed into shameless crying.

"Golly day, what's th' sense in talkin' like that? How you goin' home when you can't even find your way out o' these ol' woods?" Beany found comfort in the sound of his own voice. "I guess it won't hurt you t' spend th' night in th' woods, will it? Golly day, if a fella's goin' campin' he's got to spend th' night in th' woods once in a while. There's nothin' t' be scared of. I'd just as soon spend th' night in th' woods all alone. I'd just—what's that?"

His monologue was interrupted by the cracking of a branch behind them. They listened, tense, but it was not repeated. It became rumored about among the mosquitoes that a banquet had been placed at their doors and they arrived in hungry swarms. Finally Beany discovered that by lying on his stomach with his face in his hands and a handkerchief over the back of his neck, their only source of supply was his ears. Thus entrenched, they talked.

As the first terror of the darkness wore off they began to gain a grim satisfaction from the novelty of the situation. "Gee whizz, I guess there'll be

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some hullabaloo in town when they find we're lost," mumbled Gangleshanks through his hands.

"Yes, an' th' Tub'll be sore he went to sleep an' didn't get in on it. Nobody'll pay any 'tention to him. They'll all be gettin' us to tell about it."

"I wouldn't be surprised if our pictures was in th' paper."

"Oh, no. I don't guess they'll do that." Beany was more modest.

"Why not? They stuck Charlie Abrams in when he got almost drownded."

"That's different. You got to be pretty near killed to get your picture in the paper."

"Well, how do you know we won't be before we get through?"

"That's right. We might," said Beany hopefully. "I guess that 'ud get the Tub's goat all right. 'James Fleming, son o' Mr. an' Mrs. Fleming o' th' same name, who heroically 'scaped death last Wednesday evenin'.' Wouldn't he be sore!"

"We might be killed all the way," went on Gangleshanks, his thirst for publicity running away with his imagination. "Then I guess there'd be some fun."

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"The paper'd have a story about us right on th' front page."

"Yes, an' th' Fish might give th' school a half-holiday the way he did when Johnny Berry died."

"He couldn't do that now on account of vacation."

"That's right. It's kind of a bad time," agreed Gangleshanks. "Tell you what they might do, though. They might put up one o' those brass signs in church th' way they did f'r Johnny."

"Yes, an' th' ol' fat minister 'ud get up an' tell about what fine boys we were f'r half an hour."

"Golly day, wouldn't that make the Tub sore," said Beany dreamily, after turning this picture over in his mind for several seconds. A breeze had sprung up and was sighing through the wood. The mosquitoes became less offensive. He wriggled himself into a more comfortable position and gave himself up to the pleasant contemplation of such an ending.

He saw a great parade marching solemnly down the street behind his hearse. In the very front rank walked the school headed by the Fish. The latter was weeping bitterly at the injustices which he had done him. Directly behind were a number of little

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girls dressed in white. They carried wreaths for the grave. He could make out the inscription on the wreaths: "Our Hero." Crowds lined the curbing on either side. He could hear his name shouted from time to time, followed by cheers.

It is hard to say just where Gangleshanks came into this funeral jubilee. Perhaps he had been buried more privately on another day. Possibly he may have been cremated. Whatever the cause it is certain that no mention of his name stirred the throngs which peopled Beany's mind.

He became so wrapped up in the spectacle that he was startled by a muffled sob at his elbow. "I don' wan'a die," moaned Gangleshanks.

"Golly day, who said you were goin' to?" asked Beany impatiently. It was just like Gangleshanks to take a mournful view of the situation.

"I don't wan'a brass sign. I don' wan'a be like Johnny Berry. I wan'a go home."

A similar desire suddenly welled up in Beany's interior, mounting until his neck felt like the mumps. Gangleshanks became more violent. "I wan'a go home," he cried.

"Oh, sh-sh-shut up." Beany's voice was unsteady. He struggled with himself, then, burying

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his face deeper in his arms, he allowed the emotions of the last hour to flow into his coat-sleeve unrestrained.

Gradually the small choking noises from under the tree became more intermittent. The woods settled down to rest. Only the occasional chirp of an insect or the brushing of the wind through the trees disturbed the night.

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CHAPTER XXI

RECALL

A full stomach, plus a June sun reënforced by fire, had reduced the Tub to a state of coma which would have been the envy of the most ambitious anaconda. He lay on his back, his mouth offering a cool retreat for itinerant bugs.

The shouts of the amateur toreadors, if they reached him at all, only furnished food for dreams. Beany and Gangleshanks disappeared into the woods. The sun disappeared behind the same. A new moon was introduced to the world by the gathering twilight. And the Tub slept swiftly on.

A large bluebottle tacked across the field searching for a place to spend the night. He spied the Tub's face, crimson from the recent sun. Supposing it to be some new kind of a rose, he settled on the nose and looked about.

The nose wrinkled uneasily, whereupon the bluebottle climbed quickly down and crawled across the

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upper lip in order to examine the pit below. The Tub made an uneasy motion with his hand. The bluebottle stood perfectly still and it didn't develop beyond a twitch.

He leaned over the edge of the crater and looked down. The prospect appealed to him. To be sure there was a strong breeze blowing through, but it also appeared dark and safe. He saw a number of crannies where he could be well out of the draft.

Letting himself down carefully he started to crawl under the Tub's tongue. To the end of his days he will bore his friends with what followed. There was a convulsion. The mouth of the pit closed suddenly. The blue-bottle narrowly escaped death in its dark, erupting recesses. Then he was forced into the air with tremendous impetus, accompanied by a deafening noise.

The Tub sat up spitting imaginary bluebottles in all directions. It was dark. For a moment he could not think where he was. Then he saw the glowing ashes of the fire, felt the grass under his hand, and slowly realized that he was in the wilds. He stood up to find his companions, but was unable to see through the darkness.

"Hi, Beany! Oh, Gangleshanks!" he called.

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The only answer was a faint “-shanks,” thrown back at him by the woods.

His first and natural thought was that this was some new kind of a joke. “Cu-cu-cu-come on out o’ there. I see you,” he shouted. The only effect of this stratagem, however, was to make his voice sound strangely out of place.

The Tub sat down, miserable, and listened. He could hear nothing but the fiddling of a cricket orchestra in the field. Fear crept over him. He turned suddenly to catch the Thing which he was sure was behind him. Then his courage sank one notch lower. He didn’t dare to look again.

The dread of ridicule kept him seated beside the dying fire. He had no doubt that Beany and Gangle-shanks had gone on some expedition and would be back shortly. He considered it shabby treatment, however, to leave him alone like this without a word of warning.

The grass rustled. The Tub shrank even more within himself. Then he knew that it was the breeze moving the tops of the grass above his head. He could make out the woods in front of him; a black bank of mystery. The feeble glow from the fire only made the darkness more jumpy. He decided

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to wait until he had counted two hundred slowly. After that he had no plans.

In the meanwhile the innocent cause of all this confusion had been standing for some time in a bewildered frame of mind near the edge of the woods. She had never regarded man as a friendly animal. On the other hand, until today, his hostility had merely taken the form of an occasional whack with a rake handle or a passing kick which did not hurt much. It might have been a form of human play for all that she could tell.

These bipeds of the afternoon had been unmistakably different. It was obvious from the first that they had intended severe bodily injury. For that reason she had not returned to the barn as was her custom, but had chosen to remain in the friendly shelter of the woods. The flies, however, were troublesome. For a long time she stood quite still, brushing them off as best she could with her tail. Then the whole affair got on her nerves and she made a dash for the open field in front.

The Tub had counted up to one hundred and ten. He found the counting rather comforting. Then he stopped and stared at the woods, his body rigid with fear. The only thing which prevented

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his hair from standing on end was its normal tendency to that position.

The stillness had been broken by a great commotion in the underbrush. A black form, darker even than the surrounding blackness, came bounding towards him. This was the last straw. The Tub's mental back crumbled. His legs recovered from a momentary paralysis. Leaping to his feet he raced across the field to the fence. In that brief dash the Tub showed promise of track material hitherto unsuspected.

The first wheel which he grabbed was his own. He felt the twisted handlebars and threw it aside frantically. Seizing Gangleshanks', which stood next, he hurled it over the fence and followed it with his own body.

To the Tub's surprise there were lights in his home as he pedaled slowly and wearily up the driveway. He was damp, dirty and disgusted. The cool, well-groomed appearance of the house gave him the sensations of a traveler, who stumbles on a desert spring which he had sought, but never hoped to reach. The horror of the last two hours fell from him like a garment.

Dismounting, he gazed at the lights thoughtfully.

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He had supposed that it must be the middle of the night. If so these lights might indicate a search party. Then he decided that they were too tranquil to be connected with any disturbance.

Leaning Gangleshanks' wheel against the cellar window he mounted the front steps on tiptoe and peered under the living-room shade. His father was reading aloud from a book while his mother knitted. The calmness of the scene irritated the Tub. One might suppose it a matter of utter indifference to them if their son were being torn to pieces by wild animals in the wilderness.

He was about to knock on the window when a new thought flashed through his mind. How was he going to explain his presence without either Beany or Gangleshanks? Of course he might say that they were lost. On the other hand suppose that they were sleeping soundly in the tent at this moment. In that event his name would go down in history as a joke. His ribs ached at the thought.

In this indecisive frame of mind the Tub went down the steps and stood by his wheel, wavering. He wished that he were brave enough to ride all the way back and clear up the mystery. Nothing, however, would have induced him to visit that field

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again until it was lit by the convincing rays of the sun.

He went around to the side door and felt under the mat. His fingers closed on the latch key. By letting himself in quietly he could sneak up the back stairs unnoticed. In the morning the situation might have changed. He considered the possibility of rising early and returning to the camp before anyone was up.

It was a mess whichever way one looked at it. So he did the easiest thing. He unlocked the door softly, replaced the key under the mat, and crept upstairs to his room. There he undressed stealthily without turning on the light and crawled into bed.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY

The sun was pushing its first rays over the edge of the hills when Beany was awakened by a strange cry. It appeared to have been uttered right in his ear. He sat up and looked about him considerably dazed. He had been lying on a patch of leaf-strewn grass near the edge of the woods. A few yards away his view was cut off by the back of a red barn. On the overhanging eaves stood a rooster, confidently challenging the morning sun.

Gangleshanks moved uneasily, then sat up, rubbing his eyes. He ceased rubbing to stare. He looked at Beany, at the barn, at his own feet. Then he reached out and touched Beany gingerly. Apparently satisfied of his earthliness he ventured to speak.

“How’d we get here?”

Beany shook his head. “Got me.”

“But I thought we was lost in the woods.”

“We were.”

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“Then how’d we get here?”

“Golly day, I tol’ you I didn’t know.” Beany had been awake a few moments longer than Gangleshanks and his mind was proportionately clearer. As it cleared his conviction became stronger that there had been a mistake—the sort of a mistake which is packed carefully in the family cupboard and the key thrown away.

“Gee whizz, you don’t mean t’ say we been sittin’ behind that barn all night!” To Gangleshanks the dawn of truth was cold and grey.

“I guess we have.” They sat and gazed moodily at the barn, half expecting to see it disappear in a puff of smoke. “Golly day, if we’d walked straight ahead like I wanted to we’d a’ been at that farm house in another minute.”

“That’s right,” cried Gangleshanks hotly. “Blame it on me. I s’pose it was me that picked out this place an’ said we’d stay here till mornin’. Gee whizz, I’m hungry—an’ stiff, too.” He rose and tried stretching. The effort brought him no pleasure, so he gave it up and hobbled to the edge of the woods. “Come here,” he said. Beany approached him unsteadily. “Look a’ that.” Instead of the trackless forest which they had imagined the

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night before the country lay spread out on either side of the barn in a succession of neatly ploughed fields.

"Le's go round th' woods an' get back before the Tub wakes up," suggested Beany.

"Perhaps we can make him think we was there all night." Gangleshanks was an optimist.

They had only taken a few steps, however, when a man with a broad red face stepped around the corner of the barn. He wore a straw hat, too small by several sizes and too old by several years. The boys stopped and looked at him in amazement. It was Mr. Javers.

Amazement was not confined to Beany and Gangleshanks. Mr. Javers also stopped, stared, then took off his hat as if hoping to clear his vision in that way. Finding that he saw the same thing with or without his hat he put it on again, and with it his best trade smile.

"Gooday," he said, quite as if this were a customary encounter. So many things remained unexplained to Mr. Javers because of his deafness that he had come to accept conditions just about as he found them. "Ain't seen my cow, have y'?"

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"We're out campin'," shouted Beany. "An' we got——"

Mr. Javers nodded pleasantly. "Yes, indeed," he interrupted. "Probably come in hersel'." Then, after a pause. "Had breakfast?"

"No." The reply was so vehement that it caused Mr. Javers' unsensitive ear drums to vibrate. He started, wondering if perhaps his hearing was getting better.

"Come on," he said. "Just goin'." He turned towards the house, the boys following eagerly.

Mr. Javers evidently did not consider his house as part of his model farm. Or perhaps he was an efficiency expert and believed in saving motion by letting everything lie where it fell. Whatever the cause his domestic arrangements would have been difficult to reproduce without the aid of dynamite.

Beany and Gangleshanks, however, were not in an æsthetic mood. They were starving materialists. As they entered the kitchen, living-room and dining-room their noses learned from the rusty stove that a new life had begun. Recent sufferings immediately became a memory.

They could not have fallen in with a better man than Mr. Javers. Being unable to hear anything

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except orders for butter and eggs he refrained from unnecessary conversation. All that concerned his practical mind was that there was Quality in the house. In Its honor he constructed a great omelette, supplemented with slabs of corn bread, molasses, and strong black coffee.

The last item added a distinct holiday flavor to the whole meal. Neither Beany nor Gangleshanks were yet allowed to take part in this ritual at home. Privately they considered it very bad, in which judgment they were right. They hid their distaste, however, and consumed it in large quantities, smacking their lips and declaring from time to time that it was "the stuff." It gave them a feeling of manly equality with Mr. Javers.

"Goin' in town?" asked Mr. Javers when the meal was finished. He cleaned up the dishes with commendable simplicity by placing them in the sink and turning on the water.

Although Mr. Javers did not seem to have the slightest interest in the cosmic forces which made them his guests, Beany felt that some explanation was necessary. With his mouth very close to his host's ear he managed to convey three points: first, that they had gone camping; second, the location

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of the camp, and third, that they would be very much obliged to Mr. Javers if he would take them back there.

Mr. Javers regarded him solemnly for several seconds. Then he nodded and said, "Yes, indeed," leaving them completely in the dark as to whether he had understood a word.

Within the next half-hour they were seated in the rear of Mr. Javers' covered yellow truck, their knees hooked over the tailboard. Mr. Javers' roadway, which consisted of two ruts made interesting with an occasional rock, ran along the edge of the woods for several hundred yards, then merged with the main highway. They turned into the latter and chugged through the woods for a quarter of a mile. The country then opened out once more into farmland.

Beany looked curiously off to the left. There was a familiar look to the field which they were passing. "Stop!" he cried as a white tent came into view. But Mr. Javers bowled serenely on. Beany picked a perilous way through the butter and eggs to the front seat. The yellow truck came to a sudden stop.

They climbed down. "Gooby," said Mr.

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Javers, releasing his break and preparing to resume his journey.

The thought of being cut off once more was too much for Gangleshanks. "Don't go," he cried. "We'll get our stuff an' ride in with you."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Mr. Javers. "Gooby." The truck started to move ahead. Gangleshanks jumped on the running-board. "Don't go," he screamed. "Wait. Ride in."

Mr. Javers stopped once more, surprised. "Yes, indeed," he said.

They climbed over the fence doubtfully. It was impossible to tell just when the truck might disappear in a cloud of dust. The camp had a deserted look. One corner of the tent had fallen down. Their baggage lay piled in the grass where they had left it the previous afternoon.

"Le's scare him."

They crept up on the tent, then rushed it with wild yells, calculated to shorten the Tub's normal span by several years.

It was empty.

"He's gone!" They looked in the direction of the bicycles.

"An' he's taken my bike!" cried Gangleshanks

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wrathfully. "Just wait 'til I get hold o' that Tub. He won't be able to ride f'r another week. How'd he think I was goin' t' get home on that ol' thing?"

They rolled the tent into a ball. Whatever else they could find went into the back of the truck. The bicycles were tied on the running-boards. The wilds became once more a field.

Walnut street had not yet breakfasted. It was still in the act of shaving and bathing. Mrs. Fleming stood on the front porch enjoying the early morning coolness. A familiar yellow truck drew up in front of the house.

"That's odd," she mused. "Mr. Javers doesn't leave anything here till tomorrow." Then, to her amazement, the campers climbed stiffly from the rear of the truck and began to transfer their belongings to the curb.

"Now jus' shut up," warned Beany out of the side of his mouth as he saw his mother approach. "Le' me talk."

When anything out of the ordinary happened Mrs. Fleming always concluded that there was an accident at the bottom of it. "Beany!" she cried, hurrying towards them. "What *is* the matter?"

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"Why, *nothing*, mother," replied her son in a surprised tone. He permitted himself to be kissed with the grace of a man being brushed after having his shoes shined.

"But Alexander? Where is Alexander?" she asked, failing to see the Tub. "Beany, has anyone been hurt? Quickly. Alexander's been hurt."

This was just the information which Beany wanted. Apparently his mother knew nothing of the miserable experience. Although it deepened the mystery of the Tub's disappearance, it also solved his problem by giving him a reason for being where he was.

"Oh, mother!" he said, sparring for time. "Of course nobody's been hurt. You always think somebody's been hurt."

"But where's Alexander?" she insisted, not reassured, but glad that if someone had been hurt it was Alexander and not Beany.

"That's just it," said Beany. "We don't know. We had to come in an' look for him. He ran away."

"Ran away?" Mrs. Fleming was more and more puzzled. "What do you mean? Why should he run away?"

Gangleshanks, who had been untying the bicycles,

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stopped to look at Beany in open-mouthed admiration. Never had the Napoleonic qualities of his friend appeared to better advantage. He grasped the situation like the faithful Lieutenant that he was. "I wouldn't be surprised if he got homesick," he said.

"An' he took Gangleshanks' wheel," added Beany.

"Which is why we had to come in with Mr. Javers." Gangleshanks considered the last contribution nothing less than a flash of genius. All the evidence seemed to be accumulating in their favor.

"I'll telephone right down to Mrs. Hemingway." Mrs. Fleming went into the house, the boys following. Mr. Javers looked after them undecidedly for a moment. Then he said "Gooby" to no one in particular and drove away.

Mrs. Hemingway was startled. She knew nothing about the Tub. She had supposed that he was with Beany and Gangleshanks. Then, laying down the receiver, she climbed to his bedroom and opened the door quietly. The Tub lay on his back, his mouth open, his face smirched with the stains of travel.

"I don't see why you fellows have anything to do with that Hemingway boy," said Mr. Fleming half

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an hour later as he watched Beany and Gangleshanks make tremendous inroads on their second breakfast. "He's just a little fool. That's what he is. He's too fat."

"It's a shame," said Mrs. Fleming sympathetically. "Just when Beany and Gangleshanks were having such a good time on their camping trip to have it spoiled by one silly boy. Why don't you go out again and leave him behind? It would serve him right."

"Oh, I don't know," said Beany hastily, but with studied indifference. "I guess now we're here we might's well stay. I got a lot o' stuff to do in back."

"Yes, there's a lot o' stuff to do in back," agreed Gangleshanks vaguely.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE DUKE'S REVENGE

The black cat sat beside the stove thoughtfully polishing her face. The kettle lid danced a merry little jig to the tune of escaping steam. The ancient alarm clock, suspended by a string over the sink, ticked sturdily. All was peace.

Beany opened the kitchen door and peered about the room. The black cat ceased polishing, and fixed a rigid eye on the intruder. Experience had taught her to place no confidence in this small human who appeared ignorant of the laws governing the relationship between men and cats.

Having assured himself that the kitchen was empty Beany swung the door open boldly and entered. A brown bowl lay bottom up on the shelf. It housed a tin pie-plate and seven doughnuts.

Beany counted them twice with a thoughtful expression, and transferred six to his pockets. After deliberating a moment, however, he removed one and laid it beside its mate on the pie-plate. Reluc-

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tantly he replaced the brown bowl and turned in the direction of the back door.

Great events are shaped by trifles. The cackling of geese altered the fate of Rome. Conversely, the statuesque silence of the black cat had an unforeseen bearing upon Beany's future. He was bored, and the black cat would have afforded him just the entertainment which he craved. His attention was directed instead to a paper-covered novel which lay on the kitchen table.

It was the picture on the cover which attracted him. Three men were shown engaged in a desperate struggle on the edge of a precipice. Over this frontispiece he read the title: "The Duke's Revenge." Having studied the composition for a moment Beany slipped it under his blouse and hurried through the back door.

With his physical and mental reinforcements he passed through the backyard and around the corner of the barn. In the rear was a long, one-story carriage shed which sloped away from the sharply pitched roof of the main building like a platform. It was shut off from the prying eyes of the house, and could only be reached by means of a telegraph pole. Here was privacy.

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Having climbed the pole and settled himself with his back against the slate roof of the barn, he pulled the book from under his blouse, the doughnuts from his pockets, and began to read idly. Not for long, however. The author of "The Duke's Revenge" wasted no ink on useless scenic descriptions or characterization. From the first paragraph he wrote of life, crimson and dripping. Before he had finished the last doughnut Beany's conscious self was submerged into that of the Duke.

He had become so absorbed that he did not hear Gangleshanks and the Tub climb the telegraph pole. He was not aware of them until the vizor of his cap was jerked violently down over his nose.

"Golly day," he cried peevishly, pulling off the cap, "what's th' sense in that?"

"Where you been?" asked Gangleshanks.

"Here."

"We been whistlin' fer you most an hour."

"Wha-wha-what you doin'?" The Tub indicated the book with a grimy finger.

"Readin'," replied Beany simply. He looked at the book as if he had seen it for the first time.

Gangleshanks sniffed contemptuously. This seemed to him a sorry way of passing an afternoon.

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"Gee whizz, there's no pictures in it. I wouldn't read a book with no pictures in it."

"Well, I guess you'd read this. Golly day, this is th' slickest book *you* ever saw. It starts right out killin' a fellow. It's all about a Duke what got kidnapped by gypsies when he was a kid. An' what they didn't do to that Duke! That's as far as I've got."

"Le-le-le's read it," suggested the Tub.

"You read it." Beany pushed the book at Gangleshanks.

"You!" Gangleshanks pushed it back with unaccustomed modesty.

"I'll read it," decided the Tub. He was proud of his reading. It was the only form in which he could handle the English language without tripping over his own tongue. Gangleshanks, who had few literary tendencies, amused himself by breaking off bits of slate from the roof and scaling them into the alley below.

They read until the sun had set behind the houses over the way. Even Gangleshanks, forced to listen by the depletion of his slate reserves, admitted that it was "some story." It was agreed that they meet again the following afternoon and finish the book.

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“The Duke’s Revenge” would have been pronounced dull and trite by more sophisticated readers. To Beany, and his small group of thinkers, the struggle of the deposed Noble to regain his title was the essence of Romance.

The Tub finished and looked off across the roofs with a hazy expression. “I’d like to be a gu-gu-gu—”

“Gypsie,” supplied Beany. “So’d I. I bet I’d never ‘a gone back to Dukin’!”

“Nor me,” agreed Gangleshanks. “If I ever get a chance I wouldn’t be s’prised if I was one. Gee whizz, I wish somebody’d stole me when I was a kid.”

“Who’d want to steal you?” Beany’s tone was belittling and the conversation drifted away from Romance.

The seed had been sown, however. The influence of “The Duke’s Revenge” was immediately reflected in their daily lives. Beany developed what he assumed to be a swaggering, devil-may-care walk. He took to hissing thoughtfully through his teeth. He terrified the cook by confiding to her that he would as soon kill a man as eat. He spoke seldom

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and replied to all questions in short, gruff sentences emphasized by a scowl.

Mr. Fleming complained that he was getting to be an unmannerly young cub. His mother, who understood these vagaries better, merely shook her head and prophesied that he would be all right shortly.

During the long August afternoons they met as gypsies for the purpose of kidnapping children. This was most unfortunate for the black cat who took the rôle of the infants. Occasionally they tortured a rich man for his money. In those phases the Tub was always selected for the victim by a vote of two to one.

Thus passed a week of adventurous Bohemianism. Then Beany was obliged to make his yearly pilgrimage to his Aunt Julia, who lived in West Milford. This broke up the continuity of the sport, and after a half-hearted attempt to renew it, Gangleshanks and the Tub sought other pleasures.

At the end of the week Mr. Fleming motored out for his son and brought him back during the evening.

The following morning Beany appeared before Gangleshanks had finished his breakfast.

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"I've found some," he whispered excitedly as the latter rose from the table with an egg yolk mouth.

"Found what?" asked Gangleshanks sleepily.

"Gypsies, you dummy. A whole camp of 'em. Just like in th' book. They had camp fires an' were cookin' things 'n everythin'. I was comin' home with father in the auto last night an' we passed their camp. He said they was gypsies all right. It was too dark to see much, but they looked like an awful lot."

Gangleshanks was now more awake. "Le's go an' tell the Tub," he suggested.

On the way to the Tub's Beany elaborated on his story, throwing in imaginative details from time to time until the incident had attained the importance of a magnificent adventure. The Tub, when treated to this account de luxe, was duly impressed.

"Gu-gu-gosh," he commented, "le's go-go-go an' see 'em."

Beany and Gangleshanks looked surprised. The possibility of coming into closer relationship with Romance had not occurred to them. It disturbed Beany. He had drawn so liberally on his imagination that he felt the entire structure would suffer from inspection. The Tub, however, was insistent.

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"We might take our bikes and ride out at that," admitted Gangleshanks. "Gee whizz, I'd like to see some real gypsies. They might have a Duke with 'em or somethin'."

The possibilities of this idea took possession of Beany's imagination and outweighed the chances of his being branded as a Munchausen. "We could ride out in half an hour," he said. "The camp's just before you get to Turnersville."

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CHAPTER XXIV

A NOBLEMAN FROM NOWHERE

And thus it came about that a short while later three small boys, one extremely fat, all extremely hot, might have been seen pumping down the dusty road to Turnersville. About a mile outside of the village their progress was blocked by a large sign which announced "Passable, but Dangerous," and pointed, with a crude hand, to a trail worn through the dusty grass on the side.

A short distance back from the road stood the roadbuilders' camp; two crude tar-papered shanties in the midst of a dismal clearing. Scattered about the open space were the charred remains of fires and a motley debris of tin cans, pails, bits of clothing and kindling wood. It was not yet eleven. The inhabitants of the camp were engaged in their daily struggle to cut a notch in Poland's Hill, just around the bend. The place was deserted.

"This is it." Beany felt that he had given a rather exaggerated impression in his description.

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In fact the place looked very different from what it had during his passing glimpse on the previous night. Then the fires had been lighted; the men's faces, lit by the glow, had appeared savage and romantic. He was secretly disappointed.

"Wu-wu-where's the gypsies?" asked the Tub with suspicion.

"They're out," retorted Beany loyally. "Golly day, you don't think they're goin' to lie around all day waitin' fer you, do you?"

The Tub appeared to accept this explanation. Propping their wheels against the fence they approached the bunk-houses. A cur dog rose sullenly, stretched, and after emitting one short bark, slunk out of sight.

A moment later a man's head appeared in the doorway of the right-hand shanty. He took in the boys slowly, then partially emerged through the door.

"Evenin'," he greeted.

He was a most extraordinary-looking person for such a place. His hair, which was shiny and black, was carefully parted on the side and plastered flat with water. In the front it rolled back like a breaking wave. His face was long and smooth-

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shaven except for a large mustache which curled up at the corners. He wore a green silk shirt and a collar of the stand-up type which fell away in front, allowing his Adam's apple to move freely up and down like a piston. When he talked it seemed as if his words were being pumped up from some inner reservoir. Over all was tied a large and dirty apron which fell to the top of a pair of stylishly pointed, but cracked, patent leather shoes. They gave to his entire make-up an air of jauntiness out of keeping with the surroundings.

"Evenin'," he repeated as they advanced doubtfully. "Out fer a little constitutional?"

Having no idea what this might mean they looked at one another and laughed nervously. The silence grew embarrassing.

"We came to see your camp," said Beany; Gangleshanks and the Tub seemed incapable of speech.

"An' mighty polite of you, that was," replied the stranger. "If I'd known you was comin' I'd 'a had it tidied up a bit." He leaned against the door post, crossed his patent leather shoes, and, producing a half-smoked cigarette from under his apron, lit it without taking his eyes from their faces.

Beany felt that having made the opening speech

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all further advances were expected to come from him. He sought in vain for something appropriate to say to a strange gypsy who insisted upon referring to the middle of the morning as evening.

"We've never seen a gypsy camp before," he offered lamely.

The man in the doorway looked puzzled. Then his mustache twitched. He blew a hasty smoke screen through his nose to cover it up.

"No!" he exclaimed. "Won't you come in? Fortune tellers all out for lunch. Might sit down an' wait."

Inside was gloom, but as their eyes became accustomed to it they made out rows of bunks in double tiers. In the middle, a long table with benches pushed under it on either side. Near the door a stove, on which pots were bubbling. The air was heavy with a thick smell of tar-paper, garlic and wet clothes.

"Seat?" suggested the man, pulling one of the benches from under the table. "M' name's Doolittle. Good name for gypsy, eh?"

They sat down uneasily and stared at their host in silence. This was so different from the gypsy camps described in "The Duke's Revenge," that they

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could find no common meeting ground. Mr. Doolittle busied himself over the stove for some time, then sat on the end of the table and resumed his cigarette.

"Int-rested in gypsies?" he asked.

"Very," said Beany politely.

"That's right," approved Mr. Doolittle. "Nice people. Now you've seen the place, how do you like it?"

"Fine." Gangleshanks spoke for the first time. Mr. Doolittle turned to stare at him.

"But sort o' diff'rent," added Beany.

Mr. Doolittle blew a smoke ring through the open door.

"Changeable folks—gypsies," he said. "How'd you 'spect to find 'em?"

"Well, I didn't s'pose they'd be dressed just like you." Then, fearing lest he had hurt Mr. Doolittle's feelings, Beany hastened to add: "Of course I like the way you're dressed better. It's diff'rent from the pictures, that's all."

The stranger had an uncomfortable way of staring at the last speaker as if digesting his words: "Well," he confided, "I ain't what you'd call a reg'lar gypsy."

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Beany glanced quickly at Gangleshanks. The latter kicked back understandingly. Was it possible—? No, it was too absurd. Beany leaned forward.

"Were you—were you ever kidnapped?" he asked.

"When you was a baby?" added Gangleshanks.

Mr. Doolittle looked from one to the other as if certain suspicions which he had entertained as to their sanity were being confirmed. He glanced at the Tub, but he was dozing with his head on the table. Half closing his own eyes he followed the course of a smoke ring as it drifted over the stove and dissolved.

"Mebbe," he said. "Why?"

"Oh, it isn't anything." Beany felt that he had put himself in a ridiculous position. "It's just a book we been readin' about a fellow that was kidnapped by gypsies when he was a kid."

"Sounds reasonable," remarked Mr. Doolittle, rising to push one of the pots further back on the stove. "Wha'd he do about it?"

Beany went into the history of the unfortunate Duke with some detail. He felt that given an understanding of the book, Mr. Doolittle might not

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think his question so foolish. Their host listened with interest, occasionally nodding his head and blowing through his mustache. When Beany had finished he sat looking from one to the other until they began to fidget under his stare.

“Live back in town?” he asked unexpectedly.

Beany nodded, disappointed that his oratory had produced no more effect than this.

“What’s your father’s business?” was the next irrelevant question.

“Mine’s a lawyer.” Beany wondered what possible interest this could have to the stranger. Mr. Doolittle nodded.

“And yours?” he asked, turning to Gangleshanks as if he had been a census-taker.

“He makes things.”

“Of course. Of course.” Mr. Doolittle looked through the open door for several seconds.

“Interestin’ yarn about that—that—what’s his name?”

“Duke?” suggested Beany.

“Duke. That’s it. Duke. Fiction strange. Life stranger, as the burglar said when he fell through the grating into the lockup. If I was to tell you about myself you wouldn’t believe it.”

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They looked at him with curiosity.

"I'm a Lord!" Beany and Gangleshanks moved away hastily along the bench. They were, in turn, beginning to suspect that Mr. Doolittle might not possess all his mental buttons. The Tub opened his eyes wide, gazed at the speaker for a moment, then allowed them to close again.

"Stranger still," continued Mr. Doolittle, watching the effect of his initial declaration, "I was stole by gypsies when I was a kid."

Instead of being thrilled by this coincidence, Beany and Gangleshanks were thoroughly frightened. If there had been any possibility of escape they would have seized it, but Lord Doolittle sat between them and the door. The expression on his face was forbidding.

"Stranger still," said he, looking suspiciously behind him at the stove, "they're tryin' to kill me."

Beany's face turned several shades lighter under his coat of summer tan. "Yu-yes, sir," he stammered, for Lord Doolittle appeared to be awaiting his comment.

"Who was it had took the Dook's place an' was tryin' to knock him off in that story of yourn?" he asked.

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"His half-brother." Beany tried in vain to smother the quaver.

"Well," Mr. Doolittle's voice sank almost to a whisper, "in this case it's my second cousin."

He approached so close that Beany could feel his breath on his face. "My second cousin," he almost hissed. There was another silence.

"That's—that's too bad," said Beany with an agonized glance at the bright, normal world just outside the door. Mr. Doolittle turned once more to his stove. Beany's eyes met Gangleshanks'. With mutual accord they rose and rushed past him, panic-stricken, into the open air. To their dismay the Tub dozed calmly on. They hesitated, just over the threshold, unwilling to desert him, but afraid to remain for another moment in the presence of this ghost out of the dim world of books.

"What, what!" cried Mr. Doolittle as they scurried past him. "Goin' so soon? Why, we was just gettin' acquainted. Your young friend here ain't in no hurry. Damn sorry to see you go, if you'll excuse the expression. Damn sorry. Like for to meet up with you again. You know my address. S'pose you give me yours."

They gazed at him without replying. The Tub

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raised his head from the table, rubbed his eyes and stared about stupidly.

"I was askin' your address?" said the gypsy-Lord.

"784 Chestnut Street," replied the Tub mechanically. "Where yu-yu-you fellows goin'?"

"Home," snapped Beany.

Mr. Doolittle fished a pencil stub from under his apron, tore the corner from a piece of brown wrapping paper and made a note of the address.

"Good-bye." He left his stove and came to the door. "If my second cousin wasn't occupyin' my castle just now I'd ask you fer a week-end. As it is, you're always welcome to me humble nest in the wilds. At your service, gen'lemen." Placing his hand over his heart he made a deep bow.

Beany gave him one uncertain stare, then turned and half ran, half walked to the fence followed by Gangleshanks and the Tub.

Their host watched them from the doorway.

"Rummy beggars," he muttered, and thrust the memorandum into the pocket of a dirty check coat which hung beside the stove.

Mr. Doolittle was an unknown quantity in the roadmenders' camp. But in that motley assemblage of derelicts it was a matter of little interest whence

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he came or whence he might be going. They began trooping back now from the cut, an odorous, ill-assorted band. Mr. Doolittle hastily removed the pots from the stove and poured their contents into large tins placed at regular intervals on the table. Having emptied the last pot he beat upon it with a spoon. "Come and get it," he cried morosely.

They entered, silent and deliberate. Taking their seats at the table, they scraped great heaps of food from the pans to their plates and set to work with lowered heads. All but one man, who entered last. He stopped for a moment behind the cook. "That guy was around again this mornin'."

The latter looked up with a hard expression on his ferret-like face. "What doin'?"

"Talkin' to the boss."

Mr. Doolittle swore a low but dynamic oath. "He's goin' to get his if he monkeys round here," he muttered. The other man shrugged his shoulders and took a place at the table. What happened to the unwelcome stranger was none of his business.

The gang finished and filed out in silence to lie under the trees and smoke during the brief half-hour before they were compelled to resume their

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back-breaking struggle to make the grade easier for automobile engines.

Night came. The smoky kerosene lamps were lit. The evening meal was dispatched with the same efficient ferociousness as its predecessor. Fires sprang up outside the bunkhouses. A few of the men had pulled off their shoes and rolled into their blankets. At the end of the table near the stove, four men were playing cards with a limp deck.

Lord Doolittle surveyed this scene both inside and out from his vantage point near the door. He pressed his thumb and forefinger against his silky black mustache several times with a nervous motion. Once he seized a small metal mirror from behind the stove and examined his features by the dim yellow rays from the lamps.

The man who had spoken to him at noon arose from the ground beside the fire and lounged towards the shack. He leaned against the wall near the open door and continued to puff stolidly on his pipe without taking his eyes from the fire.

"That bull's outside again." The words crawled from between his pipe and the corner of his mouth with no visible effort.

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"The hell!" Lord Doolittle hastily placed the mirror in his hip pocket.

"Down by th' fence now talkin' to th' boss.
There's another guy with him this time."

"The hell!"

There was a long silence during which neither moved from their slouching positions.

"They're comin' up this way," warned the man by the door.

"The hell!" exclaimed Mr. Doolittle, this time very vehemently. Ripping off his apron he tossed it under the stove and reached upwards for the soiled check coat. As he did so he glanced over his shoulder. What he saw apparently determined him to change his mind, for he abandoned the coat, moved with the smooth swiftness of a cat down the length of the bunkhouse, and disappeared through the door at the further end.

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CHAPTER XXV

AN ATTIC PHILOSOPHER

Immediately after breakfast the following morning Beany and Gangleshanks proceeded to the Tub's house to hold council. The events of the day before had completely upset their usual routine. Romance on the printed page was one matter, but when it popped up in flesh and blood it set their world completely by the heels.

Not for one moment did they suppose that the stranger with the black mustache might be other than what he claimed. On the journey home the Tub had dared to suggest this possibility. He had been so unmercifully sat upon, however, that, to all outward appearances at least, he was converted to their views.

They retired to a corner of the backyard where they were hidden from the house by the lilac bush. Here they began to rehash the adventure for the fiftieth time.

"I wish he'd looked more like a gypsy," said

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Gangleshanks, pounding a hole in the turf with the heel of his shoe. "Gee whizz, he didn't even have ear-rings."

"Why should he?" exclaimed Beany impatiently. "Golly day, I guess gypsies don't have to dress in uniform like they was in the army. Besides," he added with an inspiration, "if he's a Lord why should he look like a gypsy?"

Beany smiled as if the matter were not worth arguing further with one of Gangleshanks' mental caliber. Feeling himself somehow foiled by this attitude, the latter turned angrily to the Tub, who was engaged in whittling away the toe of his shoe.

"Why don't you say somethin'?" he asked in an impatient voice. "How's a fellow goin' to know anythin' if you don't say somethin'?"

The Tub turned a round, surprised face toward his questioner.

"I du-du-don't think he's a Lu-lu-lu-lord at all," he declared and began to sidle out of reach along the grass.

"Oh, don't you? You're smart, aren't you?" Gangleshanks shot out a detaining hand which caught the Tub by the ankle. "Sit on his head, will you, Beany? He's gettin' too darn fresh."

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“Cu-cu-cut it——”

“Sst, less noise,” said a voice.

Lord Doolittle was resting his chin on the top of the fence behind them.

“Sst,” he cautioned once more. Then, nodding pleasantly, he climbed over and sat down on the grass. He was still in his shirt sleeves, minus the apron. His clothes were covered with bits of grass and hay. His pale jaws were in need of a shave. In spite of his reassuring smile, the boys drew away fearfully.

“Mornin’,” said Lord Doolittle, fishing through his pockets for a cigarette butt. “Lost your address. Hard time findin’ you. Any of you gen’lemen happen to have a cigarette on you? Course not. Bad habit. Spoils the breath; stains the teeth. Fathers smoke?”

“The Tub’s does,” volunteered Beany, finding his voice.

“Fair enough. What’s good enough fer him is good enough fer me. Run into th’ house, my little lad, an’ borrow a handful of cigarettes. Needn’t say I’m here. Just an informal call. An’ while you’re passin’ through the kitchen if you’d pick up a little somethin’ fer th’ inner man. Light breakfast this

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mornin'. Mostly hay. Poor diet, hay." He turned to Beany as if for confirmation.

"Very," murmured Beany. His heart was still pounding unreasonably.

The Tub, however, resented being addressed as "my little lad." He did not stir.

"Go an' get some cigarettes," ordered Gangleshanks.

"I don't know where they are."

"You better find out." Gangleshanks drew up his knees as if about to rise. The Tub changed his mind.

"Oh, all ru-ru-right," he sulked. "I don't see why I always du-du-do the dirty work. If there's any dirty work to be du-du-done it's me."

Noting that Gangleshanks was half on his feet, however, he didn't wait to continue the argument, but disappeared around the lilac bush toward the house.

"Nice chap," commented Lord Doolittle. "Obliging. Hate to ask him. Rather awkward position, though. Second cousin after me again." He made a suggestive motion with his forefinger across his Adam's apple which sent cold prickles down his auditors' spines.

"Disagreeable fellow, second cousin. Just as soon

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kill a man as step on a bug. Have to lie low fer few days. Let you take me in if you will. Awfully good of you. Reward some day. Hide fer a little while. Not a word to parents. Nobody." Once more he made the disagreeable pantomime of cutting his throat with his forefinger. "Got any place you can put me? Barn, outhouse, cellar, attic? Not fussy about quarters."

The boys looked at one another in dismay. The stranger's fortunes were closing in upon their private lives with a disagreeable intimacy. They shook their heads.

"Come, come!" cried Lord Doolittle impatiently, "this won't do at all. Got to take me. Great reward some day. Got to take me now, though. How about stout friend?"

Suddenly Beany had an idea. The top floor of the Tub's house was divided into three servants' rooms with a garret in the rear. In this garret Mr. Hemingway kept his collection of shotguns, fishing tackle and other camping paraphernalia, which he seldom used now, but which he overhauled with loving care each winter. In order to insure these treasures from the curious handling of his son's friends he had placed a strong padlock on the

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door. It was understood that the attic was taboo. The key lay in the library desk. Beany knew this, for the Tub had once showed it to him in an unfortunate moment of confidence.

This of all places should be a safe retreat for their unwelcome guest. No one was ever allowed to enter but Mr. Hemingway, and he only made use of that privilege during the winter months. Beany outlined his plans to Gangleshanks.

"Just th' thing," cried Lord Doolittle with enthusiasm. "Sportsman's den. Quiet an' retired. Couldn't be better."

"Suppose the Tub won't open it," suggested Gangleshanks.

"We'll make him." Beany's jaw was set.

The Tub returned with a handful of cigarettes, a half loaf of bread and several slices of cold bacon. The Duke put the cigarettes on the grass by his side and fell upon the food like a starved wolf. Beany explained the situation to the Tub.

"In my house!" he exclaimed, as Lady Macbeth had done under similar circumstances. "Nu-nu-nuthin' doin'." He started to back away from the inevitable, but Beany had anticipated the movement. He was seized firmly by the coat until Gangleshanks

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had a chance to come up from behind and pin back his arms.

Together they laid him, kicking and struggling, on the grass. Beany sat on his stomach and worked his ribs like a harpist, while Gangleshanks bore down firmly on his mouth with a grimy hand. The Duke watched the proceedings with approval. The Tub became a writhing, inarticulate bundle from which emerged smothered howls.

“Will you do it?”

“Nu-nu-no. Ouch. Du-du-don’t. I’ll tell fu-fu-father. I’ll——” But Gangleshanks’ hand shut off the rest. “I guess we’ll have to give him a knuckle rub,” he said, regretfully. Beany nodded and Gangleshanks began a frenzied massaging of the Tub’s scalp with the knuckles of his tightly closed fist.

The hand over the Tub’s mouth was lifted. “Oh, ouch, I’ll ’e ’ood. Cut it out. Oh—Lu-lu-lord—oh.”

“Will you open that door?”

“Yu-yu-yes, anything. Oh, ouch.”

The torture stopped. The Tub rose sullenly to his feet. “I’ll get even with you fu-fu-fu-fellows

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yet," he muttered. They allowed him this small satisfaction without contradiction.

"Very kind," said Lord Doolittle, lighting one of the cigarettes. "Kind, I'm sure. Southern hospitality. When will the room be ready, my little lad?"

"I'm not your little lad," sulked the Tub.

"True, true," replied the amiable visitor. "My misfortune, but true. But when do you think I can occupy the apartment without being—well—er—frankly, without being seen?"

All eyes were turned on the Tub. The spotlight restored to him a portion of his dignity.

"Mu-mu-mother's goin' out this afternoon and it's the cu-cu-cook's day out," he said.

"Good," replied the Duke lightly. "I will prepare to go to my rooms when your mother an' the cuckoo-cook, which you refer to, have departed. In the meanwhile, a nap. Unpleasant night. Slept poorly." So saying, the Duke stretched himself out on the grass, closed his eyes and proceeded to fall asleep almost instantly.

They tiptoed away and sat down on the back steps to talk. The morning was interminable. At half-hour intervals they returned to peer at his

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Lordship around the corner of the lilac bush. He slept on, showing no signs of waking.

Lunch time came. Beany and Gangleshanks went home, their hearts heavy with misgivings. When they returned the Duke was still asleep. They took up their post in front of the house where they could witness the departure of Mrs. Hemingway and the cook. It seemed as if they were never going. Finally Mrs. Hemingway left after asking interminable questions about Beany's family. She was followed shortly after by the cook. They had the house to themselves.

The key was produced. They ascended to the third floor. With one hand on the padlock, the Tub paused.

"Yu-yu-you fellows made me do this," he warned.

"Who made you?" cried Gangleshanks impatiently. "Golly day, I never saw such an old woman! Open the door."

They removed the padlock and entered. The attic was a large, unplastered room with two dormer windows looking out over the backyard. On one side was a gun rack. Piled in the corners were trunks and boxes from which protruded fishing tackle, boots, brown paper bundles; the accumula-

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tion of a dozen camping trips. Over all lay a thick powder of dust.

Behind some trunks they discovered an old camp mattress. From the beds downstairs they removed two blankets and a pair of sheets. The beds were carefully arranged afterwards so that they showed no signs of the theft. The Tub contributed a pillow from his own bed, but with bad grace.

Beany entered into these novel furnishing arrangements with gusto. No comfort of Mr. Doolittle's was overlooked by his active mind. From the sideboard he borrowed a set of eating utensils; from the pantry a pile of dishes; a towel from the bathroom and a water pitcher and soap from the cook. The library table furnished the latest magazines which were laid in an orderly pile on the floor by the improvised bed.

While Beany was adding a few finishing touches Gangleshanks fussed over one of the trunks.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

He held up a reel of heavy fish line with a large iron hook attached to the end.

"What's that for?"

Gangleshanks walked to the window, raised it on its rusty weights, and slowly paid out the line. He

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let it drop until it was on a level with the kitchen window and then wound it in with a self-satisfied expression.

"Wonderful," cried Beany with rare admiration. "Golly day, we could have pulled all this stuff up if I'd thought of it earlier. Let's get Mr. Doolittle an' show him."

The guest was delighted. "Snug as a bug," he declared enthusiastically. "Much needed rest." He inspected the fish line with approval. He also tested the tin gutters with his arm. "Well-made house," he praised, drawing in his head. "Don't lock door when you go out. Case of fire, you know. Say good-night now. Ring if I want anything." He sat down on the mattress and began to unlace his shoes.

"Are you goin' to bed?" asked Beany in some surprise.

"Certainly," replied the Duke, allowing one muddy shoe to fall on the white sheet. "When not necessary to be awake, be asleep. My motto." Having removed his shoes he started to slide between the sheets.

"Wait!" Beany disappeared down the stairs. A few moments later there was a whistle from be-

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low. Gangleshanks looked out cautiously and saw Beany's head sticking through the Tub's bedroom window directly underneath. "Let down the line," he called in a stage whisper. A moment later Gangleshanks brought up a most remarkable fish bearing a curious resemblance to Mr. Hemingway's best silk pajamas.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SPIRIT WORLD

"Funny where all the magazines are gone," exclaimed Mr. Hemingway half to himself. "Did you put them anywhere, Agnes?"

Mrs. Hemingway looked up from her paper.
"What are you looking for, Jim?"

"The magazines. I was reading an article in one of them."

"Then it's just where you dropped it." His wife resumed her reading with the calm of one accustomed to such disappearances.

But the magazines were not to be found. Gradually Mrs. Hemingway was drawn into the hunt, then Norah. Dinner in consequence was a fretful meal. The Tub talked feverishly. Once or twice he caught his father's eye looking at him with suspicion. As soon as dessert was finished he seized his cap and hurried from the house, mumbling excuses.

Shortly afterward Norah appeared at the door

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of the living-room. Her face wore a troubled expression.

"Sure, mum, there's somethin' gone from every bed in th' house," she announced, twisting her apron nervously.

"Something gone? What do you mean, Norah?" The missing magazines flashed through Mrs. Hemingway's mind.

"I was turnin' down the beds, mum, an' I noticed there was only one blanket on yourn an' Mr. Hemin'way's. An' then when I come to Mr. Alexander's bed there was no pillow. An' then I went in the spare room to look, an' th' sheets was both gone an' th' bed fixed back as well as you please. There's some deviltry under it all an'——"

Mr. Hemingway was on his feet. "Those boys!" he exclaimed.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but I don't think the boys could 'a been in this 'cause Mr. Alexander's pillow is gone, too, an' the likes of they couldn't fix up a bed th' way this was done."

"Well, if it wasn't the boys who in heaven's name do you think it was?" asked Mr. Hemingway impatiently. "Who do you think is going to come in

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and take something off every bed and then make them up again—spooks?"

"Bless us, sir, don't talk about 'em." Norah backed away from the door fearfully and followed Mrs. Hemingway up the front stairs to the bedrooms.

An hour later a careful checking-up had revealed the additional loss of one water pitcher, six dishes and five pieces of silver. Conjectures ran in all directions, but none led to a rational solution of the mystery.

The Tub, returning casually, heard the story in detail. He made no comment, but listened to his mother's account with scared eyes.

"You don't know anything about this, do you?" Mr. Hemingway's voice threatened.

The Tub's lip trembled. Big tears gathered in the corners of his eyes and spilt down his cheeks. The enormity of his crime descended upon him like a shroud. He felt his mother's protecting arm about his neck.

"Jim, how can you talk to Aleck like that? You act as if he was a common thief. I don't understand you sometimes." She turned to the Tub and addressed him by his old baby, pet name. "Never

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mind, Allykins, come upstairs and I'll read to you while you're getting undressed."

At this Allykins broke down completely and was led from the room uttering dismal sobs. Mr. Hemingway, after staring unhappily at the vacant doorway for a few moments, resumed his newspaper.

When Beany and Gangleshanks approached the Tub's house the following morning they discovered him waiting for them on the front steps. With tears in his voice he told them of what had happened. Both looked relieved.

"Gee whizz. Is that all? What are you stewin' about?"

They retired to the backyard where they could watch the attic windows. Suddenly Gangleshanks nudged Beany. They looked up. The Duke was standing at the window making violent motions with his forefinger in the direction of his mouth.

They turned to one another in dismay. This was a detail which had been completely forgotten, since they had laid the fish line on the floor the day before. Through the open door of the kitchen came the sound of Norah's voice humming a tune over the breakfast dishes. Their guest's face glared at them menacingly from the window. Then they saw

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the end of the fish line descend over the sill until it was almost on a level with the pantry.

"What are we going to do?" asked Gangleshanks, turning to the Tub in despair. The latter only shrugged his shoulders sullenly. Gangleshanks turned to Beany. "We can't do anything while she's in there," he complained, pointing in the direction of the cheery voice.

Beany's face registered thought. "I know. Gangleshanks, you go round to the front door and ring the bell. As soon as she goes to answer it I'll get in the pantry. The Tub can stay here and tell when to let down the hook."

"But what'll I say when she comes to the door?"

"Golly day, can't you do anythin' fer yourself? Don't say. Hide."

Gangleshanks looked at him with respect. "Gee whizz, I wish I could think up things like you!"

The singing stopped as the bell over the kitchen sink gave a long, impatient ring. "Lord save us," muttered Norah, reaching into the broom closet for her white apron. She tied it over her working clothes and hurried out of the room.

Beany was in the kitchen almost before she was out of it. By the stove lay a market basket half

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filled with clothespins. Without stopping to empty them he seized the basket and rushed into the pantry. There was no time to pick and choose. Opening the ice-box door he pulled out a dish of cold boiled potatoes, a half-eaten leg of lamb, a bowl of soup stock, three bottles of ginger ale and a bowl of mayonnaise. These all went into the basket. He heard the muffled sound of the front door shutting. Norah would be back in another minute.

Putting the handle of the basket over the point of the hook he climbed softly out of the window after it and dropped down on the grass beside the Tub. Full of their guilt they sneaked around the corner of the house furthest from the kitchen door.

The basket jerked clumsily upward. Midway in its ascent it caught under the roof of the back porch, and tilted perilously. Through its bottom descended a thin trickle of soup stock. Then, with a sigh of relief, they saw it disappear. Norah's head protruded from the kitchen door. They fled in a panic to the front of the house.

Mrs. Hemingway returned from a morning of shopping and let herself in at the front door. As the key clicked in the lock Norah appeared from the back hall.

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"I'm leavin', mum," she announced. There was a wild light in her eyes.

"What in the world is the matter now?"

"There's an evil eye on this house, mum, that what's th' matter with it." Norah followed her employer into the living-room. "It's the devil himself is rompin' around, ringin' door bells an' makin' food fly out th' window past me very eyes."

"Norah, what *are* you talking about?"

"Just what I'm a-tellin' ye, mum. Door bells ringin' an' none to ring 'em. Food disappearin' out of the ice-box an' me standin' in front of it. An' last night I heard the devil snarlin' an' chokin' outside me room." At the memory a tremor passed over her stout frame.

"Nonsense." Mrs. Hemingway tried to make her voice sound contemptuous, yet as she turned to look out of the window, she felt creepy. The boys were sitting on the front steps discussing some new game. The sight of their innocent faces reassured her.

"I'm leavin' this afternoon, mum. I wouldn't stay under this roof another night fer all the money you've got."

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Having delivered this decision Norah flounced back to her kitchen.

A hot morning blended into a hotter afternoon. Beany, Gangleshanks and the Tub sat behind the lilac bush and discussed the situation forward and backward, without discovering an outlet. They were afraid to remain staring at the attic window. On the other hand they could not leave its baleful influence in order to take up the more ordinary pursuits of life.

A man appeared in the driveway. He walked toward the barn, stopped, looked at the house, at the barn, at the clothes flapping on the line, and finally at the lilac bush. Here he perceived three heads watching him curiously. Giving his hat an additional tilt he sauntered toward them. The boys continued to stare. If this was another Noble seeking shelter against his relatives he would receive little hospitality.

"Youse kids live here?" He indicated the house with an unlaundered thumb.

"He does." Beany pointed to the unhappy Tub.
"We don't."

"M'm'm." The stranger made a queer sound with his lips as if trying to imitate a cornet. From

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his pocket he pulled a small scrap of brown wrapping paper which he studied, then looked at the house to corroborate what he found there.

"This is that, ain't it?" he asked enigmatically showing the paper to the Tub. Beany and Gangleshanks looked over his shoulder, and their eyes grew wide. It was the paper on which Lord Doolittle had noted the Tub's address. They drew away from the stranger, never taking their eyes from his face, like small animals hypnotized by a snake. It occurred to them all simultaneously that this must be the man who had caused the Duke to make those unpleasant motions with his forefinger. The stranger appeared unconscious of the silent panic which he had created.

"This is that, ain't it?" he repeated, shaking the paper in order to call it to their attention. He put his question directly to the Tub.

"Yu-yu-yu-yu——"

"Whistle," recommended the stranger. "You ain't seen a slick lookin' guy with black hair, have you?"

The Tub gave him a miserable stare and shook his head. Beany and Gangleshanks breathed easier. The stranger glanced sharply from one to the other.

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"What's the matter with youse kids?" he asked impatiently. "I ain't goin' to eat youse. Sure you ain't seen a fellow what looks like a dago hangin' around?"

Once more they shook their heads without replying.

"Solid ivory," muttered the stranger, discouraged. He straightened his back to look about.

At this moment Norah appeared on the back porch. She had on her street clothes and in her hand was a wicker suitcase. The stranger left the boys and walked towards her.

They watched him lift his hat as he approached. A long conversation followed. The two walked out of the driveway side by side.

"Who do you s'pose 'twas?" asked the Tub as they disappeared around the corner of the house.

"The man he's runnin' away from, I s'pose."

"Gee whizz, what are we goin' to do now?"

"I know one thing *I'm* goin' to do. I'm goin to get out of here before he comes back."

"Me, too," said Gangleshanks decidedly.

"An' lu-lu-leave me to do the du-du-du-dirty work." The Tub's voice denoted rising indignation.

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"It's your house, ain't it?" Beany had one foot over the fence.

The Tub watched the spot where they had disappeared for some moments, then hurled himself after them with unbelievable speed for one of his build.

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CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE NIGHT

Norah's sudden departure had been the final straw to break down Mr. Hemingway's judicial calm. He stormed up and down the living-room denouncing cooks, superstition, ignorance and a dozen other evils which, he declared, were threatening civilization.

Supper, prepared and served by Mrs. Hemingway, was a silent meal. The atmosphere was charged with high explosive and the Tub, feeling that any word of his might be the spark to set it off, maintained a discreet silence. Even this failed to protect him, however, from the master's wrath.

"What's the matter with Alexander," he exclaimed impatiently as the gloomy feast came to a close and Mrs. Hemingway rose to collect the dishes. He addressed the remark to his wife as if the Tub were a piece of machinery which appeared to be out of order.

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"Goodness, I don't know," she replied crossly.
"Why don't *you* ask him?"

"Because he's a fool." Mr. Hemingway stamped into the living-room in search of a cigar.

In a daze the Tub slid out of his chair and wandered into the kitchen. After watching his mother wash the dinner dishes for several moments he crept up the back stairs to his room.

Alone on the dimly lighted second floor he was seized with a panic. He tore off his clothes and jumped into bed, leaving the light burning. For ages he lay with his face buried in the crack between the two pillows, populating the room behind him with a thousand eerie shapes; hearing a thousand sneaking footsteps.

To his immense relief he finally heard his mother turn out the lights at the head of the stairs. He pretended to be asleep. She uttered a low exclamation as she entered his room and discovered the burning light. For a moment he felt her presence above him accompanied by a delicious sense of protection and peace. Then the light went out. He heard her raise the window, and draw the door half shut. A moment later the soft click of her

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own bedroom door warned him that he was alone with the night.

Downstairs the clock struck ten-thirty. Then eleven echoed by another clock somewhere across the city. His position became cramped, but he did not dare to move. Half-past eleven. At twelve he took advantage of the commotion made by the striking clocks to turn over.

Tick, tock, tick, tock. He could hear the grandfather clock in the hall below and admired the spirit which enabled it to stand there, surrounded by dark enemies, and proclaim itself so valiantly. Tick-a-tick-a-tick-a answered the small alarm clock on his bureau.

The clocks had begun to blend together into a dream when a creak from the stairs froze him once more into rigidity.

The Tub knew the location of that stair. It was the second above the landing. He knew the idiosyncrasies of every board in the staircase, having made a study of them for political purposes. He remembered another place in the second stair below the landing and listened.

“Crack!”

That was it. His hair stirred uneasily at its

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roots. Someone was cautiously and slowly descending the front stairs.

Below, a long patch of dim light from a street lamp fell across the living-room floor. It was momentarily blotted out by a dark shape, which moved, silent and swift, across it. Then from out of the shadows beside the window emerged a head. The curtain was drawn back. The head remained motionless for several moments gazing into the deserted street.

An electric street lamp shed a round patch of light on the pavement and grass about it. Its rays were softly reflected by the leaves of the trees above. The street was apparently empty. Then through the gloom on the left shone a tiny pinpoint glow. A moment later a faint cloud of smoke floated across the lamp-lit area.

The watching head at the window disappeared.

Very faintly came the scraping of a chain bolt being withdrawn from its socket. Then utter silence once more.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, from the grandfather clock. Tick-a-tick-a-tick-a-tick-a from the alarm. The Tub lay in the same position, his hands clenched and moist. And yet in his inmost conscience he did not

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believe that this was more than a figment of his own imagination. His sense of fear was already too overtaxed to permit of anything more dreadful.

“Crack !”

It was the second stair below the landing.

“Crack !”

It was the first stair above it. Then, after a lapse of several moments, he became aware that his door was opening slowly. He knew the harsh sound of the bottom panel scraping over the rug.

The noise of the opening door stopped. Then, just as slowly and carefully, he heard it shut again. There was someone in the room. He screwed his eyes together and tried to breathe naturally. A light step approached the bed. Someone was standing over him.

Then he felt the bed clothes move. The warm night breeze blew upon his damp, trembling body. He opened his eyes slowly and saw a dimly familiar shape beside his bed.

“Now do as I tell you an’ you’re all right. Do anything else an’ you’re all wrong. See this.” The Tub shrank away from a black object which he recognized as a revolver. The ends of Lord Doolittle’s mustache raised slightly as if he were smiling. “Do

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as I tell you. Live to be an old man," he reassured.

The Tub waited, speechless, for his command. Lord Doolittle crossed the room noiselessly and stood for a moment looking out over the tin roof of the back porch and across the yard. As he looked a black figure moved deeper into the shadows of the barn and was swallowed up. Lord Doolittle nodded and returned to the bed.

"When I say the word," he whispered, emphasizing his directions by tapping the handle of the revolver on the Tub's trembling knee, "you climb out that window onto the roof. When you're there, walk around till you count fifteen. Then you're to start yellin' an' keep on yellin' till somebody stops you."

The Tub was dumb. Mr. Doolittle repeated his instructions carefully. "Y' understand?" he asked threateningly. The Tub nodded. He couldn't have answered had his life depended upon it.

"All right, get to the window, an' remember, if you don't do it right I'm behind you."

The Tub stood by the window looking out over the little tin roof. Lord Doolittle watched him for a moment, then opened the door into the hall with delicate care. Reaching into the darkness he picked

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up a heavy suitcase which he had apparently left there upon his entrance.

"All right," he whispered. "Go to it."

Scarcely knowing what he was about the Tub threw one pajamaed leg over the window sill and crawled out onto the roof. He was conscious of the cold tin underneath his feet.

His Lordship crept down the front stairs once more. With one hand on the knob of the front door he stood looking through the narrow glass window at the side.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of a police whistle blown in the rear of the house. A man came running from the shadows of the trees in front and hurried down the drive. Then, from the floor above echoed a series of wild shrieks containing all the pent-up emotion of a tortured night.

The Duke nodded approvingly. Opening the front door he walked boldly out onto the porch, down the steps, and away into the darkness.

"And one of the strangest things about the whole affair," said Mr. Hemingway, going over the details the following evening for the benefit of the Flemings, "was that Alexander should go out of his head

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at just the moment when the thief was trying to escape. He won't say a word about it. I don't think the whole affair is very clear in his mind. The doctor is keeping him in bed for a few days, giving him some sort of a tonic. Tomorrow there's a woman coming to give him oil rubs. Dr. Lake says they're excellent in cases like this."

"Poor little fellow," murmured Mrs. Fleming sympathetically. "And you say this person had been living in the attic for some time?"

"Apparently. He'd moved everything in the house up there except the piano. And that's another thing we can't understand. I keep the attic door padlocked and the key in my desk. The padlock was opened and the key has disappeared."

"And just inside the window," added Mrs. Hemingway, "was a basket with food still in it, and a long string tied to the handle."

"You see there must have been an accomplice working outside," explained Mrs. Hemingway. "But how did any one know about that key? I've never told a soul in the world where I kept it, principally because I didn't suppose it was important enough."

They shook their heads. It was indeed perplexing.

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The following day Mrs. Hemingway lifted the Tub's coat and trousers from the chair where they had been hung on the memorable night. This would be an excellent opportunity, she reasoned, to send them to the tailor's for cleaning and repairs.

Absently she emptied the pockets. A broken knife, a tightly wadded, and unbelievably dirty, handkerchief, a small stone, a pencil end, a long thin key. She laid these objects on the kitchen table, and handed the suit to the waiting tailor's boy. Then she returned to the table and looked at the collection fondly. She picked up the key and turned it over curiously to read the small tag which was attached.

Her careless air vanished. She mounted the back stairs and tried the key in the attic padlock. It fitted. Returning to the kitchen she stood holding the key in her hand for some time. Then opening the back door she descended to the yard. In a corner between the back porch and the cellar wall she stuck the key and planted her heel upon it firmly.

Several blocks away Beany and Gangleshanks wandered about the former's yard, restless, but too crushed by the recent debacle to initiate the simplest enterprise. On the floor of the barn lay a yellow

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object. Beany entered aimlessly and picked it up. It was "The Duke's Revenge."

A plaintive meow came from the open door. Beany turned and flung the book with a venom which could scarcely have been inspired by so innocent a sound. A flash of black tail vanished around the corner of the building.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

MENTAL DISORDERS

Mrs. Fleming paused before the bathroom door. From within came a great splashing, groaning and grunting suggestive of the death struggle of two aquatic monsters.

"Aunt Marcia's going to be here for dinner."

The struggle continued for a moment, then ceased abruptly.

"What, mother?" asked a muffled voice.

"Aunt Marcia's going to be here for dinner."

"Oh, Lord!" The noises were resumed with increased violence.

Mrs. Fleming went downstairs feeling that at least she had done her duty. Whenever Aunt Marcia took dinner with them Beany went out of his way to prove himself a total failure as regards punctuality, appearance and manners. In defending his case he always pleaded ignorance of Aunt Marcia's presence until too late. She had removed this underpinning. If he failed now he had no excuses.

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But he did not fail. His appearance coincided with the first stroke of the dinner gong. His manners were those of a courtier. Mr. Fleming looked at him curiously as they took their places at the table. Beany's face had a peculiar varnished look like an exhibition apple; an effect caused by a merciless application of soap and water. His hair was plastered tightly across his forehead like the wig of a comedy Irish woman. His hands were noticeably clean. Even his shirt collar was faultless.

Mr. Fleming noted all these things and pondered deeply on their meaning. He was much too wise, however, to remark on them. It is a delicate matter for a father to show surprise over conditions which are theoretically supposed to exist at all times. But he wondered anxiously, as he glanced over the china flowers in the center of the table, whether this sudden bodily purity were the forerunner of a crisis or the aftermath of a calamity. That it might arise from a spontaneous desire on Beany's part to do what was expected of him never entered his mind.

Beany's actions were as unwonted as his appearance. When his mouth was not otherwise engaged he wore it stretched into a self-conscious smirk. He thanked the maid politely for each dish. He

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"sirred" his father like a junior clerk. Mr. Fleming began to grow fidgety under the strain.

Under ordinary circumstances Beany usually monopolized nine tenths of the conversation with personal anecdotes tending to disclose his smartness and ability. Tonight his talk was limited to a few stilted observations suggestive of the more formal dialogue in the "Rollo Books." As a result the meal dragged out into a stiff and gloomy feast.

Aunt Marcia, however, watched these signs of "good bringing up" with approval not altogether unmixed with surprise. She was an avowed Victorian.

"Grace," she said, "the more I see of other children the more I appreciate what you have done with that child." She opened her lorgnette and leveled it at Beany as if she were noticing him for the first time in her life. In his more normal moods this would have caused her nephew to whistle, put his elbows on the table or to prove by some other outrage that his Aunt was totally devoid of judgment. Nothing is so irritating to a small boy as to be spoken of as if he were a museum piece unless it is being pointed out as an example of the proprieties.

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Aunt Marcia was undoubtedly an irritating person. Her one redeeming feature was that she frequently handed out presents without waiting to be forced into it by Christmas or birthdays. For this Beany forgave much. But anticipated bribery was not a sufficient motive to explain his present display of self-restraint. Anyone who really knew him must have sought a bigger cause.

Miss Marcia Fleming sighed, lowered her lorgnette, and turned to her sister. "How fortunate you are," she said, "to have such a beautiful child!" Beany pressed his toes against the table base very hard in order to sustain his morale. "And Margaret with those two lovely girls. It's such a blessing. You can't understand what it is to have passed through life alone. Of course I can't complain," she added hastily, "it being entirely a matter of my own choice." Aunt Marcia was always very anxious that there be no misunderstanding on this point. "Life has really been full and interesting. If only I might have had one heaven-born child it would have held everything I could have asked for."

Beany listened to this discourse attentively. He wondered what kind of a child the "heaven-born" variety might be. He had an idea that it was un-

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desirable. Anything with the stamp of Aunt Marcia's approval must be. It was probably equipped with curls and lace collars.

Aunt Marcia went home soon after dinner. She had a firm conviction that to venture on the streets after eight-thirty at night without an escort was to invite attack. Mr. Fleming had always encouraged the idea. It insured the privacy of his evening. He even went to the extent of sending her occasional newspaper clippings dealing with criminal assault.

"Poor Marcia!" sighed Mrs. Fleming, as she returned to the library after saying good-night to her sister-in-law at the front door. "She is so fond of children. What a shame she has never had any."

Her husband snorted. "Why didn't—" he began. Then he glanced at Beany who was looking at him with grave attention, and abandoned his line of thought abruptly. He picked up the evening paper and settled himself for his usual comatose hour.

Being a normal fellow Mr. Fleming followed the custom of normal fellows and lived his life after a certain unconscious rote. His day was filled with concessions to habit. He always entered a cold shower, for instance, sideways and with his right

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arm extended. He always read the humorous "col-yum" in the morning paper after he had reached his office and then rebuked himself for wasting time. After dinner he always read his paper beginning with the financial news and working towards the front. While he perused the sporting pages he liked to chew his cigar. When he arrived at the editorials he lit it. He was only dimly aware that he did these things, but was miserably upset when he was prevented from doing them.

On this evening Beany watched him as he selected a cigar from the humidor at his side and stuck it absently in his mouth. He stepped promptly forward with a lighted match. Mr. Fleming puffed slowly once or twice, then came to himself with a start.

"I didn't want that cigar lit," he said crossly.
"Why don't you leave me alone?"

Beany retired crestfallen. Mr. Fleming glancing up caught the expression and was seized with remorse. "Thanks just the same," he added, and then buried himself once more in his paper with some confusion. It was often hard to tell who could be the more self-conscious, father or son.

Beany immediately brightened up as the rebuke

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was thus softened. He studied his father thoughtfully for a few moments and then disappeared upstairs.

"Do you think he's well?" asked Mr. Fleming, alone with his wife.

Mrs. Fleming continued to knit, watching her stitches with a half smile. "I guess he's well enough. He's got something important on his mind though. We'll know before the evening's up."

"I hope so," said her husband disgustedly. "If I don't I'm going to have Doc Whitehouse look him over. I don't like this——" he stopped as Beany's footsteps sounded at the top of the stairs. A moment later he reentered the living room carrying a pair of dusty slippers.

"Here, father," he said, holding them out to his astonished parent. "I brought you your slippers. I guess they'll make your feet more comfortable."

"What the——" began Mr. Fleming, then he stopped and stared hard at his son.

"That's very nice of you, Beany," said Mrs. Fleming, continuing to knit, calmly, as if this were a nightly episode. "Lay them by your father's chair and he can put them on when he wants to."

Beany drew a small notebook from his pocket

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and made an entry with a piece of pencil. This done he took his seat at the library table and pulled his school books toward him. There was no sound for a long time but the faint click of Mrs. Fleming's knitting needles and the occasional rustle of the newspaper.

"I believe I'll get a drink of water." Mrs. Fleming laid down her work on the sewing-table beside her chair.

Beany was on his feet in an instant. "I'll get it for you, mother. Would you like one, too?" he asked, turning to his father. His voice was almost pleading.

"No," replied Mr. Fleming, looking up from his paper.

He lowered it, however, the moment Beany had left the room. "Look here, Grace," he said, almost with anger, "what's the matter with that boy?"

"Nothing that I can see, except that he is unusually thoughtful."

"Thoughtful fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Mr. Fleming unappreciatively. "He's acted like a little simp ever since he sat down to dinner this evening. Slippers, indeed!" He kicked the offensive footgear

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under the table. "I never wore a pair in my life and he knows it. This sudden obsequious manner. This simple smile all the time. I don't like it. I certainly don't understand it."

He resumed his paper as Beany reappeared carrying a glass of water which he handed to his mother and immediately made another entry in his notebook.

Quiet settled over the room once more. Mr. Fleming having finished his cigar reached into the box for a cigarette. He always smoked one right after a cigar as a chaser. The box was empty.

"I'm going to walk down to Jaynes," he announced, putting aside the paper. "Need a new stock of cigarettes."

"Why don't you telephone?" asked his wife.

"Let me telephone," suggested Beany.

"No, thanks. I'd like to walk."

"But I can get them here in no time," insisted Beany.

"Damn it," snapped Mr. Fleming with a reckless disregard for the consequences. "Can't I walk down to Jaynes if I want to? Everybody seems to think I'm going into my dotage."

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"Yes, sir." Beany resumed his work, disappointed and a little scared. The front door, slamming, blew back muffled words which Beany felt were not paternal.

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CHAPTER XXIX

ONE GOOD DEED A DAY

Mr. Fleming's doubts on his heir's sanity would have been partially dispelled could he have been present at a meeting which took place immediately after school the following day.

"How many did you do?" asked Gangleshanks.

"Three sure ones an' one kind o' doubtful," said Beany, consulting his note-book. "How many'd you?"

"Only two. I tried to do a lot more only father's kind o' queer that way. It's hard to do anything for him an' I didn't have a chance to work on anybody else."

They walked slowly across the school yard and turned in the direction of home.

"You didn't tell him, did you?" asked Gangleshanks.

"Golly day, I should say not. After the fuss he made about that ol' athletic club I guess he wouldn't stand for joinin' anythin' else."

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"But the Scouts is a kind of church thing, isn't it?"
Beany's face fell. "Who told you that?"

"Well, I know the minister of our church is always talkin' about 'em."

"Oh well, *that* don't mean nothin'," said Beany much relieved. "It wouldn't make no difference with father anyways. He says if he ever catches me in another club he'll skin me alive. You ain't told, have you?" He asked it with a sudden suspicion.

"Certainly not."

They walked in silence for almost a block. "What have you done for your good turn today?" asked Gangleshanks.

"Nothin'. There's nothin' good you *can* do in school, of course, an' I was so late this mornin' I didn't have time for anything beforehand. What did you?"

"Nothin'. I'm goin' to do mine this afternoon."

As they neared the corner of Berkeley street an elderly man stepped briskly down the front steps of one of the houses and walking to the curb stood waiting for an automobile to pass before he crossed.

"There's an old man goin' to cross the street," cried Beany in great excitement. "I'm goin' to help

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him." He started to run, but Gangleshanks grabbed his arm.

"No," he said, "I'm goin' to help him. I saw him first."

"You didn't speak for him though." Beany threw off the restraining arm and raced towards the object of his commiseration, who by this time had stepped into the deserted street and was well launched on his perilous trip.

"Hi!" At the sound of Beany's voice the man stopped and looked behind him, startled. Beany seized him by the arm. "Just lean on me, sir. I'll get you across all right."

The man showed justifiable surprise and tried to pull his arm away, but at that moment Gangleshanks caught his other one. "Don't be afraid, sir," he said. "We'll get you across all right."

The stranger looked from one to the other in bewilderment.

"I say?" he asked. "What's the row about?" He spoke with the rising inflection of an Englishman.

"We'd do the same for anybody," Beany hastened to assure him.

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"And we're not allowed to take tips for it," added Gangleshanks.

"That's devilish kind of you," said the grey-haired man. They had crossed the street by this time and reached the opposite sidewalk. "And would it be perfectly agreeable to you now if I went in this direction?" He waved his hands towards the business section.

"Oh, certainly," said Beany politely.

"Yes, indeed," said Gangleshanks.

The man bowed. "Thanks awfully."

"Don't mention it," replied Beany. Then, suddenly realizing that he was being laughed at, he turned red and walked away followed by Gangleshanks.

"What'd you want to go an' butt in for?" he asked angrily, when they were out of earshot. "Now it don't count for anything for either of us."

"Sure it does," said Gangleshanks. "It's half a good turn each."

Beany entered this in his note-book sulkily. "Golly day, we'll never get anywhere if you act like this. The next time I see a good turn you stay out."

The days which followed developed into a grueling contest between Beany and Gangleshanks to

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determine which of them should show the longest record of good deeds to the Scout Master at the end of the week. Their lives would have made the Samaritan appear like a thoughtless cad. Beany was no longer to be found in his old haunts. Each afternoon was spent in searching for some philanthropy—some kind act—which would justify another tally in the note-book.

One of the most enjoyable of all his good works was the establishment of a milk dispensary on the back porch for stray cats. He found, however, that nature and experience had made the cats suspicious. Before being succored they had to be caught, which entailed many a long chase through the broken back country of Walnut street. Catching cats had always been one of Beany's vices. To have it changed to a virtue was pleasant.

As time went on, however, a sense of appreciation began to manifest itself among the ranks of the local felines. They took it upon themselves to visit the Fleming yard uninvited. They sat about the back porch in a patient circle waiting to be fed. And at night they returned the hospitality with songs and choruses. Never, Mr. Fleming declared, had the

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city been so over-run with cats. He finally wrote a letter to the newspaper about it.

As the great army of vagrant cats began to close in on the Fleming porch Beany deemed it prudent to give up this form of kindness. From that time on his field of endeavor seemed to grow more limited each day. Numbers of people continued to cross the streets, but they were a reckless lot and resented assistance. Several times he attempted to adjust horses' nose-bags, but the ungrateful animals always threw back their heads and attempted to sandbag him with their meal.

Nor was he able to use his father as a subject for his good works. On the evening following the one already recorded he had waited at the head of the stairs until he heard Mr. Fleming's return from the office. In anticipation of that gentleman's invariable custom he had started a hot bath running. At this point his mother had called him. The bath was forgotten. When Mr. Fleming came upstairs twenty minutes later his remarks would have discouraged the spirit of helpfulness of St. Francis of Assisi himself.

And so, contrary to the laws of habit, each day found it harder for him to find a good deed to reg-

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ister in his book. Gangleshanks was troubled in a like manner. He summed the whole thing up one afternoon when he remarked, "It seems to me they're always talkin' about what you ought to be an' then when you're it they don't want you to be that."

If anyone had taken the trouble to unscramble this epigrammatic gem they would have discovered that Gangleshanks spoke truth.

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CHAPTER XXX

CONCERNING THE INFANT MICHAEL JOHN

Mrs. Michael O'Hara spent her life making the world cleaner and brighter for other people. From morning till night she washed and scrubbed and dusted, took things out and brought things back in the houses of others. The result was that by the end of the day she had but little ambition for righting her own small establishment.

Mr. O'Hara had passed on to another world two years before—a world located midway between New York and Poughkeepsie. Their parting had not been marked by one of those scenes which so delight the heart of the human-interest reporter. Mrs. O'Hara had merely shrugged her shoulders and remarked that it was one less mouth for her to feed.

The only remaining mouth besides her own was that of Michael John O'Hara, named in memory of the parent whom he had never seen. Having no other place to go Michael John accompanied his mother on all her excursions. As a result, at the end

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of a year and a half, he was unusually well-traveled and a deep student in the elementary school of life.

Now it so happened that Mrs. O'Hara numbered among her clientele a family who lived on the same block with the Flemings. Ordinarily this would have had but little significance. Michael John, however, had not been born under an ordinary star. It was a circumstance destined to have a deep and sinister influence upon his life.

Mrs. O'Hara always looked forward to Wednesdays and Thursdays, the two days when she worked at the Walnut street address. There was a big yard where Michael John might play guarded from harm and temptation by a clothesline which connected him to the clothespole.

All through the hot summer Michael John had stood for this sort of thing. Now, however, there was a tingle in the air which sent the blood racing through his veins and stirred the spirit of romance and adventure in his soul. Each week he had become more accustomed to his surroundings. Now he was aware of new and interesting objects just outside the radius of his experience—a radius which was exactly four feet long. It occurred to him that

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perhaps this clothesline was not a natural limitation after all.

Having conceived this idea Michael John, like all successful philosophers, began to investigate without delay. His first experiment was to worry the clothes line like a puppy. To his surprise, he suddenly found it loose in his hands. Holding it tightly he walked around the pole several times fearing to cast anchor and sail uncharted seas. Then, loosing all ties, he strutted out the driveway with a pronounced goose step, on his way to discover the world.

It is a long walk from the rear of the house to the front lawn measured in terms of six steps to the yard. By the time that Michael John reached Walnut street he was ready to rest. Being a young man little hampered by the conventions his actions followed his impulses. He sat down abruptly on the grass by the edge of the sidewalk and began to poke a round, inquisitive finger into the earth.

Either by chance or preordination it so happened that at this moment Beany and Gangleshanks were walking down that very sidewalk on their return from school. It had been a trying day for both. They had been kept after school for whispering the answer to a knotty arithmetic problem in which the

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Tub had become hopelessly involved. On the way home they had tried to help a collie who was removing a burr from between his toes. The collie had repaid their good intentions by removing a triangular bit of cloth from the sleeve of Beany's coat. The world seemed determined to reject every offer of good fellowship.

As they approached Michael John he rose to his feet and, goose-stepping across the sidewalk, approached the curb. Beany and Gangleshanks swooped down upon him.

"Here," cried Beany seizing him by the arm. "Don't you know any better than to get killed?"

Michael John looked up at his captors and prepared his face for crying. Then he changed his mind and made it a gurgle.

"Where do you live?" asked Gangleshanks bending down and speaking very distinctly as if he were addressing a deaf foreigner.

For answer Michael John allowed his legs to crumple under him signifying that he was a soldier of fortune and at home wherever he chanced to be. He remained dangling limply by his arms till Beany and Gangleshanks let him down on the grass once more.

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"Gee, what a stupid kid!" exclaimed Gangleshanks, disgusted. He crouched down before the delighted Michael John. "House," he shouted, pointing to several examples in the neighborhood. "Your house. Which one?" For answer Michael John reached up and tried to seize the vizor of Gangleshank's cap. The latter rose to his feet. "He's a nitwit," he declared. "But even so we can't leave him here to be run over."

They glanced about for some person who looked as if he might have lost a weak-minded child. Walnut street was deserted as it always was in a crisis. Michael John plucked a weed from the lawn and held it up for inspection.

"Dada," he said in a conversational tone.

Gangleshanks shook his head. "Gee whizz," he said, "I feel sorry for a kid like that."

"I guess we'll have to take it home and advertise." Beany removed his cap and scratched his head in imitation of his father. "Golly day, it's lucky we came along when we did."

"You bet it is. I guess that kid don't know how near it came to gettin' killed," agreed Gangleshanks warmly.

They seized the unwilling nitwit by either hand

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and bore him along between them, his legs working frantically, but only touching the ground from time to time in giant strides.

Having arrived at Beany's house they entered by the back door. There was no one in the kitchen. There was no one in the front of the house. They stopped long enough to fill their pockets with cookies, then carried Michael John upstairs to Beany's room.

Michael John, seated in the midst of confusion, a cookie in each hand, gazed about him approvingly. He had thrown himself on the world and it had not betrayed his trust. Beany and Gangleshanks sat down on the floor in front of him and looked him over with misgivings.

"What'd you s'pose we're goin' t' do with it?" asked Gangleshanks.

"Golly day, I don't know. I don't want to keep him here. That's a cinch." He stared at the adventurer for a long time thoughtfully. Michael John placed one cookie on the floor and without ceasing to suck the other he gazed about him. "Dabwa," he commented finally.

"Golly day, I never heard such a nut in my life!"

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exclaimed Beany. "Nothing up here at all." He tapped his temple.

Gangleshanks nodded and looked with contempt at the idiot child who was not in the least perturbed by their obvious disapproval. The edge of a red and white checkered tablecloth descended to the level of his eyes. He regarded it gravely for several seconds, then, seizing the fringe, gave it an experimental pull.

Beany uttered a warning cry as an ink bottle, caught like a chip above a waterfall, was drawn nearer to the edge, poised for a moment on the brink, and then disappeared into the whirlpool below which happened in this instance to be Michael John's lap.

There was an immediate protest. The liberated ink went forth in all directions. Beany sprang to his feet, but he was too late to forestall disaster. From the waist down Michael John was soaked with blue-black fluid warranted by the maker not to fade.

The sight displeased him greatly. He complained fortissimo while Beany and Gangleshanks mopped as best they could with handkerchiefs.

"Look here," cried Beany throwing his disabled handkerchief under the bed. "You've got to quit

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that, will you? Do you want everybody in the block up here?"

Michael John was apparently of a sociable nature for he continued to summon the neighbors with unabated vigor. Gangleshanks decided to make the supreme sacrifice. From the watch pocket of his trousers he pulled an old silver watch attached to a leather fob. This was his most treasured possession. He gave it up, however, like a man.

"Here," he said swinging the timepiece an inch in front of Michael John's nose. "Tick, tick, tick, tick."

The charm worked. Michael John ceased to cry and reached for the shining object. Gangleshanks drew the watch away and Michael John prepared for fresh outbursts.

"Golly day, let him have it if it keeps him quiet!" exclaimed Beany. "He hasn't got enough sense to break it."

Gangleshanks handed over his precious watch into Michael John's chubby hands. "Tick, tick," he said dubiously. At which the temperamental features of the nitwit broke into a sunny smile.

"Da," he replied.

Michael John let the watch swing on the end of

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the fob in imitation of his preceptor. Then, before Gangleshanks' horrified eyes, he raised it with both hands above his head and brought it down on the floor with a resounding thwack.

"Bagaw," he declared, looking up for applause.

Gangleshanks sprang forward and snatched away his property. Too late! The silver watch lay dead and silent against his ear. Hot tears of anger and disappointment filled his eyes.

"Doggone you——" he began, but Michael John forestalled him. Reaching out for the lost "tick-tick" he opened his mouth to capacity and produced a dismal yell.

"Golly day, give it to him," said the unsentimental Beany. "He'll howl bloody murder if you don't."

"Yes, give it to him!" cried Gangleshanks wrathfully. "An' let him bust it on the floor like it was an old rock. I guess——"

"Well, he's busted it now. You might's well give it to him. You oughtn't to have gave it to him in the first place if you didn't want him to bust it. All the good you done now is to make him holler louder'n ever."

There was no doubt on this last point. Michael John's voice contained an angry note which threat-

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ened to tear the lining of his throat. Gangleshanks looked undecided. He shook his watch once or twice, but it only gave out loose, rattling sounds. Sorrowfully he handed it back to Michael John.

The result was like turning off a victrola. Michael came to rest on a high note and slid from there into a deep-chested gurgle. He turned the watch over and over. Having smashed it efficiently he had no further interest in banging it on the floor. On the contrary he handled it now as if it were of the most fragile porcelain.

Beany watched abstractedly.

"I know what we can do with him," he cried leaping to his feet. "I got the idea. We'll give him to Aunt Marcia. She's always been wanting a baby. We'll give her this, and we won't say anything about it an' let her think it's hers naturally."

Gangleshanks, who had heard something about Aunt Marcia's aspirations before, looked at Beany with admiration. "Gee whizz," he said, "you think up things fast. When'll we give it to her?"

"Right now."

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CHAPTER XXXI

“HEVINBORN”

Thus it was that Michael John found himself once more in transit, considerably inked; the watch clutched tightly in his hot hand. They paused outside the library door. Beany had a second bright idea.

“Wait,” he said. “I’m goin’ to write a sign for it.”

He selected a piece of paper which was lying on the library table. On it he printed in large, uneven letters

HEVINBORN

As they passed through the deserted kitchen his eye fell on a clothes-basket standing near the back door.

“Le’s carry him in this.”

Michael John liked the scheme immensely. He lay in the bottom of the basket and his hand, groping idly about, came in contact with a clothespin.

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He was familiar with clothespins and rather fond of them. They were just right for sucking. He lay on the broad of his back, smoking the pin and saying many interesting things in his own language. Then lulled by the rhythmic swing of the basket he fell asleep.

Aunt Marcia lived several blocks away on one of those streets where gentility and poverty meet but do not speak to one another. As the boys approached the house carrying the clothes-basket between them they noticed several automobiles standing outside.

"Darn it all. She's got company."

They stopped and looked at the automobiles. Then approaching the house they set the clothes-basket on the front lawn and crept up to one of the windows. In the semi-darkness within they could make out the forms of a number of women who sat in orderly rows with their backs to the window. At the other end of the room stood a tall, thin figure, facing them. This was evidently Aunt Marcia. She appeared to be addressing her visitors. Beany left the window in a crouched position and retired around the corner of the house. "It's one

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of her clubs," he explained. "She's always havin' clubs."

"How're we goin' to get in without everybody knowin'?"

Beany thought for a moment.

"Maybe there won't be anybody in back. We'll take him 'round that way."

And so Michael John, still peacefully sleeping, was borne surreptitiously through the kitchen of another strange house, up the back stairs and deposited in the hall while his bearers sought Aunt Marcia's room.

"Here it is," said Beany finally. "I can tell it by the pictures."

Aunt Marcia having failed to collect likenesses of suitors had gone in rather heavily for the saints. They beamed and frowned and glared at her from every angle of the wall.

Michael John was removed from the basket and laid, still sleeping, on the bed. Beany took the paper from his pocket and, selecting a pin from Aunt Marcia's cushion, attached it to the pillow. They backed away to get the effect from a distance.

"I guess it's the best good turn we ever done," remarked Beany complaisantly.

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"I know," agreed Gangleshanks. "It seems like we ought to tell her. What's the use in doin' good turns if nobody knows you done 'em?"

The noise of vigorous handclapping floated up the stairs. Beany started.

"I guess we better get out of here before somebody catches us."

They descended the back stairs once more and went out into the street. The sound of a band reached their ears, muffled by intervening trees and houses. It grew louder and finally crossed their line of vision several blocks away. Michael John, Aunt Marcia, and the sowing of good deeds, all sank into oblivion in an instant. With a common purpose they started to run and a moment later rounded a corner and disappeared after the music.

In the meanwhile Mrs. O'Hara having finished her tasks in connection with the laundry tub was preparing to take in the washing which had been drying in the backyard all the afternoon.

She was delayed by the arrival of Dan, the odd-job man, who had just dragged the lawn mower down the cellar steps. Dan's ancestors had resided at one time in the north of Ireland while those of Mrs. O'Hara hailed from the southernmost tip.

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He was, therefore, to Mrs. O'Hara the personification of vice and profligacy. To have allowed him to pass the laundry door without hurling some sort of abuse at his head would have meant that she was false to her beliefs and the isle of her fathers.

"Good evenin'," said Dan meekly, propping up the lawn mower in the corner.

"Don't speak to me, ye munkey-faced auld reprobate," cried Mrs. O'Hara, giving an extra turn to the towel which she was wringing as if to demonstrate what she could do to necks placed in a similar position.

"Sure I only said 'Good evenin'," expostulated Dan.

"Well, don't say that, ye follower of sin." Mrs. O'Hara seized a clothes-basket from under the tub and started for the backyard. "Get out o' me way." Dan intrenched himself behind the laundry stove. "It's the likes of ye that makes fer all the unhappiness in this wurrld. Only fer the likes of ye we'd 'a' been a free people today instead of——" her voice trailed off as she mounted the cellar steps and came out into the backyard. Then it died away abruptly, only to rise again in a series of blood-curdling yells.

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Forgetting for a moment the geographical barrier which lay between them Dan rushed from the cellar. Mrs. O'Hara had dropped her clothes-basket and was staring at a piece of rope.

"They've taken him, the blue-eyed darlint," she cried. "I knew they'd be takin' him some day with those red cheeks and curly hair." She turned suddenly on the unfortunate Dan who was peering stupidly into the empty clothes-basket.

"Why don't you do something? What good are ye standin' there like a grinnin' auld munkey? If ye had any eyes in yer head this thing ud not have happened. It's yer fault, bad luck to yez, with yer dodderin' ways and yer stupid thick head. I've a mind——"

But Dan, perceiving the direction from which the storm was approaching, had fled before it. And as he sped down the drive he heard windows opened and voices demanding the cause of the outcry. He knew that the enemy had been diverted and breathed more easily.

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CHAPTER XXXII

A JOB FOR THE REFORM LEAGUE

The Wednesday Afternoon Reform League had no clubhouse. They met each week at the home of one of the members where they listened to a paper describing some condition which threatened to rock the foundations of society and civilization. No sweeping changes followed these exposures. The world had been rocked so often by similar organizations that the motion had put it to sleep. This was not the fault of the W. A. R. L. however. They continued to sound the alarm unruffled by the lack of response. It was incredible how much rottenness the League could uproot without repeating itself.

On this eventful day the meeting had been held in Aunt Marcia's house. Aunt Marcia herself had agreed to read the paper. Her subject had been "Anglo Saxon or Slav?" with a subhead, "The Grave Disparity Between the Birthrate in the Homes of American Born and Foreign Born Families." It had been an aggressive, well-written paper, deliv-

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ered in Aunt Marcia's clear nasal tones, punctuated with occasional snorts of anger. Aunt Marcia in action was reminiscent of an old battle horse who, having smelled powder, is eager for the charge.

"I close," she said formally, "by repeating what I have already said. It is the patriotic duty of every American family to bring forth into the world with reasonable frequency young men and women equipped with the ideals and traditions of American democracy, so that they may be a bulwark against the flood tides of Central Europe—flood tides charged with radicalism and Bolshevism—which are now beating against our shores. Shall Americanism be overwhelmed or shall it be strong enough to assimilate the hordes which are at the gates? The answer lies today not in our courts, but in our cradles. The balance will be established not by American capital but by American babies."

Aunt Marcia paused and modestly drank water during the applause.

"Splendid," exclaimed little Miss Vauxhall, who had just come to town and felt it her duty to be enthusiastic. "It makes you want to go right out and have a big family—doesn't it?" Then realizing

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that this was rather in the nature of a *faux pas* she turned a brilliant scarlet and blew her nose.

Aunt Marcia having taken a glass of water with her plaudits as if they had been pills was adding a few informal remarks. "In case you may wonder," she was saying, "by what right one in my position speaks on such a subject I will give you as my authority Dr. Frederick Rosenwald, the noted infant specialist, on whose committee I have served for several months. I believe that it is perfectly proper for an old woman like me to be interested in babies (ambiguous cries of 'no, no' from the rear of the room) although there has never been an infant in this house. In spite of——"

At this moment the speaker was interrupted by a thud on the ceiling above their heads. She paused to glance questioningly upwards and was about to resume her sentence when a plaintive and unmistakable cry drifted down the front stairs and in the open door of the sitting-room.

There is nothing startling or unusual in a baby's cry. A sound, however, is only common when it is in its proper place. The location of this one was distinctly disconcerting. The entire room sat rooted to their chairs, staring at a plaster nub which had

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formerly been the base of a chandelier. They seemed to suspect it of having caused the interruption.

The screams continued to grow in violence. Aunt Marcia, after a moment of paralysis, recovered the use of her limbs and rushed from the room. Her departure broke the spell. A low humming sound arose. It gradually increased to a roar. Each member must tell every other member just what their interesting impressions had been upon hearing the cry.

Little Miss Vauxhall was the first to formulate a plan of action. She was the junior member of the club and anxious to please. "Someone ought to help Miss Sawyer," she said. "I think I'll just run up."

She was about to leave the room when the firm hand of Mrs. Payson Adler was laid upon her arm. "I wouldn't go up," she said. Now when Mrs. Payson Adler said she wouldn't do anything that was usually the cue for all well-bred persons not to do it. Miss Vauxhall was a newcomer, however, and over-anxious to please.

"Oh, but dear Miss Sawyer may need some help. There seems to have been an accident."

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"I wouldn't," repeated Mrs. Payson Adler. There was a peculiar ring to her voice. "Spare her that."

"You mean——?" asked Miss Vauxhall, blushing very red.

"I don't mean anything," declared Mrs. Payson Adler grimly. And with this unintentionally accurate self-analysis she swept out of the room. It had suddenly occurred to her that the only reason Paul Revere went down in history was because he was first on the ground with an unusually spicy bit. And in order to be first he had done some hard riding.

"To Mrs. Preston Fleming's," she cried, throwing herself into her limousine, much as Mr. Revere might have thrown himself into the saddle and cried, "To Lexington."

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CHAPTER XXXIII

INGRATITUDE

While the immortal ride of Mrs. Payson Adler was taking place and while the other members of the Wednesday Afternoon Reform Club were preparing to follow her example, strange things were happening in the room upstairs.

When Miss Marcia Sawyer had first opened the door of her bedroom she had been unable to trace the howls which greeted her. Then, rounding the corner of the bed, she caught her first glimpse of Michael John denouncing with the full power of his Irish lungs the blow which fate had just dealt him.

For an instrument Fate had used the hard, unyielding floor and the blow had been delivered on Michael John's head. In order to accomplish this underhanded deed Fate had deliberately pushed Michael John out of bed.

Aunt Marcia was a woman of much practical good sense in spite of her affiliations with the Wednesday Afternoon Reform Club. Her first thought,

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therefore, was not of the peculiarity of the situation, but of the size of the bump. Michael John quickly discovered that he had fallen into kind hands. Water, cold and soothing, was applied to his ruined forehead. Words, pleasant, and comforting, were addressed to his private ear. Things, soft and soporific, were placed about and beneath him. In contemplation of these comforts he forgot to cry. Soon after he forgot even the comforts in dreamless sleep.

Then it was that Aunt Marcia unpinned the printed sign from the pillow of her bed and adjusted her glasses in order to study it more carefully. The word "Hevinborn" conveyed no more to her when read for the tenth time than the first. Although she was a religious woman she could not believe that she was looking upon an example of celestial orthography.

She turned the paper over and over with a puzzled expression. Then, laying it on the dresser, she did what she always did when anything out of the ordinary happened. She called up her lawyer. It is probable that on her deathbed Aunt Marcia would have sent for her lawyer before she sent for her doc-

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tor. It is certain that he would have preceded her minister.

News travels fast on quiet streets. At half-past four not more than ten people had ever heard of Michael John O'Hara. At five o'clock his name was on a hundred tongues. If babies like Michael John could be snatched away in that manner, said the excited mothers of Walnut street, what chance had their own super-offspring? And so it was generally agreed that, for the sake of public security, the offenders must be brought to justice.

All sorts of clues were offered, accepted without investigation and discarded without reason. Michael John had been run over and taken to a hospital. As each interested party thought of this possibility she took it upon herself to telephone all the hospitals, with no other result than to clog switchboards.

An evil-looking man had been seen lurking about the house from which Michael John had disappeared. Some had noticed that he was intoxicated. This clue was immediately popular with the moving-picture enthusiasts. It petered out, however, when it became known that the evil-looking man was the

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owner of the house who had stayed home to do some odd jobs.

Michael John might have wandered away and hidden in some dark corner. All sorts of unlikely places were searched: coal bins, wood boxes, cisterns, ash barrels. Little credit was given to Michael John's judgment in selecting a playground.

Hannah recounted the doleful tale to Mrs. Fleming when the latter returned from a shopping trip. Hannah had no dramatic sense, however, for she immediately ruined the effect by announcing that she could not find Beany's winter flannels "high nor low." Michael John faded into insignificance during the frantic search which followed.

In the midst of it the doorbell rang. Without stopping to consider the possibilities Mrs. Fleming opened the door and found herself face to face with Mrs. Payson Adler. She was not the kind of a person whom one would choose to meet at the front door with large smudges on the nose and stray wisps of hair hanging down the back.

Mrs. Fleming was not easily discomposed, however.

"Do come in," she said. "Such a pleasant surprise. I'm rather a sight, I'm afraid, but of course

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I wasn't expecting callers at this hour. So nice to see you, though."

Having assumed the offensive, Mrs. Fleming felt more at ease. She ushered her guest into the library, accomplishing wonders during the swift instant during which she passed before the hall mirror.

"I just dropped in," said Mrs. Payson Adler sweetly, "to see how you were, my dear. I began to think that you must be ill. No one ever sees you or your charming husband any more. Somebody actually told me yesterday that you'd moved out of town." Thus did Mrs. Payson Adler square her account.

Mrs. Fleming assured her that the report was unfounded. It was so nice to see her again. And how was her adorable little boy? What a pity that such a handsome child should be—well—er—she supposed that you would almost call it cross-eyed.

Mrs. Payson Adler had come as a news-bearer and found herself being drawn into a spirited fencing match. She shifted her ground immediately. Wasn't Mrs. Fleming ever going to attend any more of the meetings of the Wednesday Afternoon Reform Society? One saw such nice people there. And occasionally some interesting ones too. No.

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They hadn't been able to get anyone this week. Miss Marcia Sawyer read a paper.

A most curious thing had happened. Mrs. Fleming-my-dear would never believe it. It had already caused a lot of talk and some of it rather unpleasant. But she had known Marcia Sawyer too long to be influenced by that, of course. Although there was no denying that the subject of her paper fitted in peculiarly with the aftermath. And these modern women were so broad in their ideas, weren't they? One never knew what to expect. Wasn't Miss Sawyer a relation of Mr. Fleming? Half-sister! Oh dear she was afraid she had made a dreadful break. Mrs. Fleming would undoubtedly hate her. Having gone so far, however——

The telephone bell rang. Mrs. Fleming was called to answer it. It was from Aunt Marcia. Most extraordinary thing. A baby. What should she do? No identifications. No. Of course she didn't know who brought it. Whom should she notify?

Gradually from all this disconnected talk Mrs. Fleming began to piece out a semblance of the facts. And then it suddenly occurred to her that there might be a connection between the missing Michael

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John, whom she had completely forgotten, and this unannounced stranger. She advised her sister-in-law to take a taxi and bring the child round to her house immediately. She had an intuitive instinct that she was right, although why Michael John O'Hara should turn up in the bedroom of Marcia Sawyer was more than she could divine.

She returned to her visitor and had the supreme satisfaction of listening to the entire story without a word and then telling her that she already knew about it. That the child was in fact at that moment on its way to her house. Mrs. Payson Adler retired from the battlefield indignantly.

Half an hour later Michael John, having had his first ride in a taxicab, was delivered into his mother's arms after the most extraordinary series of adventures which had ever fallen to his lot. He was not in the least glad to see his mother. To him she merely stood for more clothesline. Having glimpsed life he knew he could never endure the backyard again. He said nothing, however, partly because he didn't know how and partly because he was a canny Irishman. But he resolved that at the first opportunity he would repeat his escape and fling himself once more on the hospitable world.

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The reunion of the O'Hara family accomplished, Mrs. Fleming and Aunt Marcia tried in vain to solve the mystery. Aunt Marcia picked up her pocket book from the library table and took out a slip of paper.

"I forgot this. It's really the most curious part of the whole affair, too. I found it pinned to my pillow."

She handed the paper to Mrs. Fleming who read it several times and shook her head. "It's a mystery to me," she said, turning the sheet over and glancing at the back. "What's this?"

"Just some figures—a memorandum or something—someone made on the back."

Mrs. Fleming looked at them attentively. Then a light of recognition and understanding spread over her face.

A few moments later Mr. Fleming returned from work.

And then, just before the supper gong rang, Beany arrived, dirty, smiling, and superlatively happy. Had he not done a record-breaking deed? And had he not been listening to the best brass band in town for an hour with the special privilege of standing right next to the snare drummer?

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"Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r—boom—boom." He said as he turned in the front walk. He felt that this was rather a neat imitation. "Br-r-r-r-rr, boom, boom. Br-r-r-r-rr, boom, boom, br-r-r umpy, umpy, um, boom, boom," he muttered as he stalked through the kitchen, through the back hall, into the front hall and paused before the hatrack. "Brr-r-rr, umpy, boom. Brr-r-rrr——"

"James!" The voice cut into Beany's dreams as a clap of thunder shatters a sunny August afternoon. He dropped his cap nervously and whirled about to meet his father's hard-set eyes. "James, come upstairs with me. I want to talk to you."

The sun was extinguished like a dark lantern. The birds ceased to sing. The snare drummer was snared. Hopeless, smothering gloom enveloped the world.

Gangleshanks was waiting for him the following morning as he started off for school.

"Gee whizz," he exclaimed, wide-eyed. "What happened? I heard they found the kid's mother and there was an awful row."

"There was," said Beany shortly.

"Well, what's wrong? Didn't your aunt like it?"

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“No.”

“Well, how’d she know it wasn’t hers?”

“Oh, shut up.”

“Oh, all right, if you’re going to be a sore head about it. Gee whizz, if I was a sore head about ev——”

Gangleshanks’ voice trailed off into a series of mutterings descriptive of the manner in which he would end his existence if he possessed one-half of the unamiable qualities of his companion. An old lady stood on the curb waiting to cross the street.

“Come on,” cried Gangleshanks. “Le’s help her across.”

“Help her yourself,” said Beany gloomily.

The Tub looked at him in amazement. “You’re a fine Scout,” he said finally, in a voice that was intended to convey contempt. “How do you expect to be a first-class Scout if you don’t do good turns?”

“I don’t care if I’m a fiftieth-class Scout,” replied the unambitious Beany, “an’ I’m never goin’ to help one again, not if they was to line up on their knees an’ beg me to.”

“Gee whizz!” exclaimed Gangleshanks, much bewildered.

And the old lady crossed the street unaided.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

THE INFERNAL FEMININE

"Dance," muttered Beany savagely, "who wants t' dance?" He removed a pair of patent leather pumps from the pocket of his overcoat and regarded them with a gloomy stare.

The strains of an orchestra drifted into the "Gentlemen's Dressing-room" and mingled with the babel of sound which already filled it. Little girls, be-starched and beribboned, passing by the open door, cast shy, curious glances at the confusion within. The atmosphere was charged with that air of grim hilarity which precedes a party.

Seated among the coats in a remote corner, Beany, Gangleshanks and the Tub took no part in the activity. Children's dancing parties held no lure for them except during the short period devoted to eating. Dancing was a form of social calisthenics requiring great concentration and exertion. As for girls, they were merely an inferior race, lacking all

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the essentials of character; to be pitied, perhaps, but scarcely sought after.

"I du-du-du-don't see why I got t' go t' their ol' du-du-dance," grumbled the Tub as he picked at the lacings of his shoe.

"Nor me," agreed Beany. "It's all right fer a fella that wants to dance, but who wants to dance, I'd like to know?"

"Nobody but sissies like Abner Lynch." Gangleshanks kicked his street shoes under the chair and stood up gingerly. "My feet hurt."

"I'll tell you right now I ain't goin' t' dance." Beany glared at the Tub, challenging contradiction. "P'rhaps they can make a fella come to their ol' party but they can't make him dance if he don't want."

"You bet they can't," said Gangleshanks heartily. "Aren't you goin' to dance 't all?"

"Not a step."

"Then nu-nu-nu-neither'll I," declared the Tub, looking relieved.

"That a promise?"

"You bet."

"All right. We'll swear not to dance an' th' first fella that breaks his swear's a nigger. We'll stick

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t'gether all the time an' when it comes to eats we'll get in ahead."

"Yu-yu-yu-you fellas won't back out now?" The Tub had grown suspicious of alliances which, more often than not, left him high and dry while the others sailed cheerfully away.

"Certainly not. An' you better not either if you know what's good for you. Far's I'm concerned all the girls can go home now."

With gloomy faces they climbed the stairs to the gymnasium where the dance was being held. They might have been on their way to witness the execution of a dear friend. Beany was about to slip unobtrusively through the door when a stout lady seized his hand and shook it warmly.

"This is James Fleming, isn't it?"

"Yes'm."

"I thought so. You look so much like your father. So glad you could come. Would you like to meet any of these little girls?"

"No'm."

The stout lady appeared surprised but as the line behind Beany was growing longer, she relinquished his hand and turned away. Somebody thrust a dance card and pencil at him. He tucked them shame-

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facedly into his pocket and pushed his way to a corner of the room where a group of contemporaries were standing about endeavoring to show, by look and gesture, supreme indifference to their surroundings. Gangleshanks and the Tub joined him a moment later and the trio withdrew into the depths of the corner where they leaned against a leather vaulting horse in apparent seclusion.

Round and round whirled the scuffling couples; bumping, swaying, their faces tense with concentration. Beany watched them with a deep scowl, intended to discourage any advances. Then an unfamiliar figure floated across his vision and was swallowed up once more by the crowd.

In that brief glimpse Beany recognized a flower from a different soil; the product of a richer and more artificial loam. Her features were small and finely chiseled. She wore an expression of mingled innocence and sophistication which might have been prized by a woman of forty.

Unlike all the other children, whose hair fell in braids or curls, this creature's was caught into a mysterious bunch which had no apparent beginning or end, but was bound in place by a broad satin ribbon. Her dress was more elaborate than any other

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in the room. On her wrist jingled three tiny gold bracelets. Most remarkable of all, on her feet were gold slippers with high French heels.

Beany had never seen anything quite like this before. He watched curiously until she came round again. She was dancing with Abner Lynch and she didn't even dance like the others. She lay in Abner's arms and seemed to glide like flowing water. All the while she carried her head thrown back so that she might look into his face with great brown eyes.

"Who's that?" Beany pointed to the vision.

"How do I know?" muttered Gangleshanks, shifting his weight to the other foot. Then suspiciously, "Who cares?"

"That's the gu-gu-gu-girl that's just come to town," volunteered the Tub. They turned to stare at him in amazement.

"How'd you know?"

"Mu-mu-mu-mu-mother knows her mu-mu-mu-mother," explained the Tub with difficulty.

"Who cares?" insisted Gangleshanks.

"Nobody."

At this moment the buxom lady in black swooped down upon their corner like a vulture.

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"Come, come," she said. "You three boys haven't danced yet."

They looked at one another uncomfortably. "We was just goin' to," explained Beany.

"Let me see your card," demanded the stout lady, much as a traffic policeman might have asked to see a driver's license.

Beany handed over his dance card unwillingly.

"Why there's nothing on this at all. I don't know what ails you boys, I'm sure. When I was little, boys were more polite. Have you met the strange little girl from New York yet?"

Without waiting for an answer she seized Beany by the wrist and half led, half dragged him across the floor. The going was congested but the stout lady made her way like an ice-breaker through a winter harbor.

To his dismay Beany found himself being introduced to the owner of the golden slippers. He placed his hand on his stomach and executed an apologetic dancing-school bow. They were left alone together. He was dancing, holding her stiffly at arms' length and looking off into the middle distance with averted head.

But this was not the way that his companion chose

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to dance. She melted suddenly into his arms and turned a pair of brown eyes so directly into his that he could not avoid meeting them.

"You dance beautifully," she murmured.

Beany turned bright red and crashed into the couple behind him. After several false starts, and much pumping of the left arm, he finally got under way once more, but his cheeks were still burning.

"People are so clumsy." He could feel her breath on his ear, and pulled his head sharply to one side.

She was looking straight into his face. He began to blush once more.

"You have lovely eyes," she said, unexpectedly.

Beany's mouth opened and shut several times without emitting any sound. "They're rotten," he disparaged finally.

"You're a goosey." She raised her hand and pinched the lobe of his ear. Beany started. In all his brief experience with the opposite sex no one had ever taken such liberties with his ear before or referred to him as a "Goosey."

"Cut that out," he growled, and began to dance furiously.

"I know a lovely place to sit," she said, as they bumped into the sixth couple and Beany gathered

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himself for another start. "It's so crowded here and the others are so clumsy. Would you like me to show you?"

"I don't care."

She led him through a small door into what, under more commonplace conditions, was a locker room. Seated on the benches were a number of sufferers who had escaped into the semi-twilight to bide their time until the food should be served and they could go home.

They crossed the locker room and entered a dimly lighted hall. Beany found himself sitting beside her on a stairway. The edge of her dress touched his hand. He drew it away quickly and shoved it into his pocket for safe keeping.

"I don't even know your name," she said, moving closer.

"James Penhallow Fleming."

"What a funny name!"

"What's funny about it?"

"I think I'll call you Billikins." Beany looked behind him quickly to make sure that no one had overheard this disgraceful remark. "What are you going to call me?"

"Oh, I don't know."

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"I don't think you even know my real name."

"Sure I do."

"What is it?"

"I know all right." Beany's feet twisted about uncomfortably. With his free hand he began to pull at his nose.

"Well, tell me then."

"I did know. I—I—I forgot."

The maid laughed and drew nearer. Inherited instinct and a close observation of her mother had taught her the rules of the game surprisingly well for one of her years. "It's Audrey Blossom," she said. "Don't you like it?"

"M-mm-mm."

"What are you going to call me?"

"I don't know."

"I know. You can call me Mopsa if you want to."

Beany stared straight ahead into the gloom without betraying the least enthusiasm over this privilege. He wished he could be assured that Gangle-shanks and the Tub were not within earshot.

"I like you, Billikins. You're much nicer than any of these other boys."

Beany wriggled from sole to crown. "Shucks."

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

"Yes, you are, and I won't have you say no."

There was a long silence.

"Don't you like me at all?"

"I don' know."

"You do too, and you know it."

"Shucks."

"You're a horrid, rude boy, but I like you just the same. Come on. The music's stopped. I've got to go back. Pull me up."

Beany offered an unwilling hand and pulled her to her feet with a jerk. He was rewarded by a soft pressure.

"You're awful strong," she whispered. "Will you come out and see me sometime?"

"I guess so."

"When?"

"Golly day, I don't know. Sometime, maybe."

"Will you come out Saturday afternoon? Father's taken the Hunter place, you know. We're going to live out there all the year around. Will you come?"

"Maybe."

"That's a promise. Come for tea about five. We've got to go in now. I have this dance with Abner Lynch. Don't you think he's a pigeon pie?"

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"He's a poor nut," replied Beany with simple dignity.

"He's not as nice as you." She hesitated, tracing the carving on the newel post with a slim, white forefinger.

"You can kiss me if you want," she offered.

Never in his life had Beany kissed except as an unwilling recognition of relationship. He faltered, considering the possibility of a quick dash across the crowded dance floor and out into the night. Then, scarcely knowing what he did, he shut his eyes and pecked wildly. His lips brushed her hair.

Gangleshanks and the Tub still hung on the vaulting horse like shipwrecked mariners clinging to a spar.

"Gee whizz, you took a long time," greeted Gangleshanks. His voice was full of sympathy. "Was it awful?"

"Not so bad."

They lapsed into silence and glared at the dancers. Then, without a word, Beany left them and plunged into a group of similarly occupied young bloods. His reason for this move became instantly apparent. The stout lady laid a firm hand on Gangleshanks' shoulder.

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"You're next," she commented grimly, and disappeared with her victim into the mêlée. Beany rejoined the Tub.

The latter watched Gangleshanks' retreating figure with compassion. "Gu-gu-gu-gosh, that's a dirty trick!"

But Beany was following Gangleshanks' progress across the floor. He was meeting Audrey Blossom. He was dancing with her. The big boob was trying to say something to her. Beany felt deeply for Audrey. It must be tough on a girl, he thought, not to be able to choose her own partners. Why shouldn't the girls do the asking? They were the only ones who really wanted to dance. He pictured himself bowing graceful acquiescence as Audrey approached him, and pushing aside a host of other little girls who were bidding for the privilege.

For several minutes he watched Audrey and her partner with a supercilious smile as they circled round and round the room. Then they disappeared. He scanned each couple as they flashed past. Jealousy made its début in his heart.

"I'm goin' t' get a drink o' water," he snapped, and left the Tub.

Beany passed the lemonade stand, however, with-

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out a glance and, circling the gymnasium, entered the locker room. The recluses still occupied the benches in dumb misery, like patients in a dentist's outer office. With outward nonchalance he sauntered across the room and leaned against the doorway leading into the hall.

"I'm going to let you call me Mopsa."

"Umph."

"Don't you like Mopsa?"

"Sure."

It was Gangleshanks' voice. Beany did not wait to hear more, but returned, with dragging footsteps, to the dance floor. Unwittingly he approached the lemonade table. The dripping sherbet cups were laid out in orderly rows. Beany drained the end cup at one gulp and then started to work systematically from right to left. The old colored man, whose duty it was to repair depredations, looked at him with an anxious eye.

"That air stuff make yo' all pow'ful sick, yo' don' watch out," he cautioned.

Beany looked angrily over the top of his cup. "Golly day, I guess I know what'll make me sick."

The old man chuckled. "If yo' don't yo' sure is on th' road t' learnin'."

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

A hand on Beany's shoulder caused him to turn.
He looked into a pair of laughing brown eyes.
Just behind their owner, his face split by a self-conscious smirk, stood the Tub.

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CHAPTER XXXV

SOCIETY

Saturday afternoon came at last, as Saturday afternoons had done for generations. During the preceding week Beany did not mention Audrey's name to either Gangleshanks or the Tub. He was uncertain what he thought about her himself. She refused to fit any of his preconceived notions about girls. She had at least aroused his vanity. Seven or eight years later Beany might have said that Audrey understood him. Now he merely thought of her as having more sense than most girls.

It never occurred to him that he might not have a monopoly on her admiration. He attributed the conversation which he had overheard in the back hall to a desire on her part to be nice to Gangleshanks. He saw no need for such an attitude, but girls were notoriously peculiar. If there was any blame it lay with Gangleshanks, who was a poor nut, always butting in where he was not wanted, and lacking sense enough to appreciate it.

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

He had looked forward to Saturday afternoon, but now that it had arrived he was nervous. Anticipation had been better than participation. Never before had he been awed by what he sincerely believed to be the weaker sex. He was ashamed of his emotions as he locked his bedroom door in order to prepare for the ordeal without interruption.

He put on his Sunday suit and shoes with great care. Then, wrapping a towel about his collar, he stuck his head under the faucet and allowed the water to play over his hair. When the last recalcitrant lock had been slicked into place he studied the effect in the bathroom mirror for a long time.

Until today Beany had never thought of his face as anything but an inconvenient area requiring constant washing. Now, as he turned it this way and that in order to catch the proper lights, he smiled and nodded slightly to the image in the glass. His lips moved. Then the smile faded and was replaced by a heavy scowl. He shoved his lower jaw out and his head forward until his nose touched the mirror. The clock in the hall struck four and his features relaxed.

On the bureau in his mother's bedroom stood a

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row of small bottles. Beany selected one marked "Cologne," and, placing his folded handkerchief over the mouth, tipped it upside down several times. After inhaling deeply he replaced the stopper and descended the stairs.

The one thing happened which he wished most to avoid. He met his mother in the front hall.

She sniffed. "Phew! Whatever have you been doing?" Then, as she noted his unusual appearance, "And where in the world are you going all dressed up like that?"

Beany avoided her eyes. "Just out," he said carelessly, attempting to pass. She reached forth a detaining hand.

"Beany, where are you going with those clothes on?"

"Golly day, mother, can't a fellow dress up decent once in a while without everybody pickin' on him? You always tell me how sloppy an' dirty I look an' then, when I dress up for you, you don't seem t' like it."

Mrs. Fleming hesitated. She was not at all convinced, yet she lived in constant fear of curbing any transient good which might appear in her son,

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

by always assuming that he was guilty until he proved himself innocent.

"Well, remember you have your best suit on, then, and that you're not supposed to play in it. If you're going to play at all you'll have to go upstairs and change it."

"Golly day, mother, I'm not goin' t' play. You seem to think——"

"I didn't say you were. I said 'if' you were. Don't you think you'd better leave that handkerchief behind? You smell like a perfume shop."

"Oh, mother!"

"All right. I don't mind if you don't. You're the one who'll be teased. Now remember, your father and I won't be home for dinner this evening. You're to have yours at half-past six. You can ask Gangleshanks over if you want, but you must be in bed by nine. Mind now. And don't get that suit dirty."

But Beany was out of the house. Seizing his bicycle, which leaned against the verandah, he started to ride away.

"Beany!"

"Ma'am?" He stopped, maintaining his balance with one foot on the ground.

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"You're not going to ride a bicycle in that suit?"

"Oh, mother! Just up an' down in th' clean street. Golly day, I won't hurt it."

"Very well, then, but remember what your father'll say if you get grease spots on it."

She watched Beany as he coasted down the sidewalk and out the drive. He was really a nice-looking little boy when he fixed himself up.

Beany's first stop was at Mrs. McGruder's candy shop. He inspected the contents of the counters and then turned to the gaudy colored boxes which were piled on the shelf behind.

"I think I'll take that one," he said, indicating a large heart-shaped container, tied with a scarlet ribbon.

Mrs. McGruder took down the box and started to wrap it up. Beany fumbled in his pockets and produced a small handful of very small change. Mrs. McGruder ceased wrapping.

"Two dollars," she said.

Beany counted the coins slowly as if he hoped by so doing to stretch the total to the necessary amount.

"Have you any boxes like that for thirty-nine cents?" he asked finally.

Mrs. McGruder replaced the red heart on the

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

shelf with a sigh. It had lain there since Valentine's day, seven months before, and she feared it might be growing stale.

"You better stick t' loose," she advised, opening the back of the counter.

Beany made a careful selection with an eye to quantity rather than quality. Even at that it made a pitiful showing when placed in a brown paper bag. He stuffed the bag into his pocket, gave Mrs. McGruder his entire fortune, and left the shop with a heavy heart. It was hard to make much of a gesture with thirty-nine cents.

He sampled the chocolates and found them satisfactory. Then he tried several others in order to make sure that they were of uniform excellence. Who cared about the box anyways? Somewhat cheered he resumed his journey.

The Hunter estate lay a good five miles outside of the city limits. It was a fine, cloudless afternoon, and past its brown stone gates there streamed an endless line of pleasure cars. It was far from good bicycle riding. Again and again Beany was forced into the loose dirt by the side of the road at the shriek of warning claxons. Each passing car flaunted its banner of dust behind it. The yellow

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particles sifted over his shoes, his Sunday suit and into his eyes, ears and mouth. An occasional trickle of perspiration wound through the grime and was absorbed by his collar.

Just before he reached the brick wall which marked the beginning of the Hunter property, another cyclist emerged from the dust in front and passed through the brown-stone arch.

Beany pumped slowly up the winding drive which led to the house. Through the trees he caught glimpses of an imposing white front, of terraced lawns, and a sparkling fountain. The formality of the oaks, which bordered the graveled road, caused his heart to sink. His hand slid into the pocket containing the paper bag and came out bearing moist brown proofs that it was still there. Slowly he rounded the corner of the house, then stopped in amazement.

Gangleshanks was standing under the porte-cochère beating dust from his clothes. At the sound of crunching gravel he looked up.

"Gee whizz, what're you doin' here?" he asked, with no great show of pleasure at the coincidence.

"What're you?" Beany leaned his bicycle against the side of the house and approached defiantly.

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"Oh, I just come out."

"So'd I."

"Wha'd you come out for?"

"I was asked."

"So's I."

"Yes, you was!"

"Bet I was."

It was an awkward situation. They glared at one another, uncertain what move to make next. Beany pointed to Gangleshanks' travel-stained clothes.

"You're not goin' in lookin' like that, are y'?"

"Like what?"

"You look like you been dragged out here."

"Oh, I do, do I? Well, I guess you don' look like any ban' box yourself."

Beany glanced down at his dusty shoes and let his eyes travel upwards as far as they would go. His face fell.

"Do I look's bad's you?"

"Worse."

"Le's go home."

At that moment the side door opened and a small vision in pink and white fluttered onto the porch.

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"Why, it's Billikins and Doodleboy. Come on in. I thought you'd forgotten me."

Beany and Gangleshanks looked at one another as she mentioned the nicknames. Their faces expressed mutual contempt. The hostess began to laugh.

They watched her sourly for several moments. "What's so darn funny?" asked Beany, as she showed no signs of stopping.

"You are," cried the merry girl, and went off into fresh convulsions. Still laughing she led them into a great marble hall with forbidding chairs standing in the corners. They followed her, speechless and sullen.

"Oh, dear!" cried Audrey, wiping her eyes with a tiny handkerchief. "You both look so funny." They looked anything but funny as they stood in the semi-twilight glaring at her. "Come on out on the terrace. We're going to have tea out there."

But Beany remained by the marble table, twirling his cap. His pride had been severely bruised. "I don't like tea," he said.

Audrey crossed the hall and patted him on the arm. "I didn't mean to laugh," she said. "And I

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

like you this way better than if you'd been all dressed up."

"But I am all dress——" began Beany, then thought better of it and stopped.

Gangleshanks watched this scene derisively. "Aw, gee whizz," he remarked to the red plush chairs.

Audrey led the way through a maze of gorgeous rooms and ponderous furniture. Once Beany reached for the paper bag. Then he decided to wait for a more propitious moment.

They stepped through a French window and found themselves on a terrace overlooking a formal garden. In the middle of the terrace was a table, laden with food. Seated at the table, furtively devouring loose bits of frosting from the chocolate cake, sat the Tub.

In the shock of this meeting Beany and Gangleshanks forgot their animosity. They stopped, half-way through the window and stared. The Tub was the only one who showed perfect composure. He nodded, smiled, and continued to nibble frosting.

Audrey mistook the pause for embarrassment.

"Excuse me," she said, in her best imitation of her mother. "I thought you knew one another.

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Alexander Hemingway, this is James Fleming and Harry Braceworth."

Beany caught his toe on the threshold. He stumbled and turned red.

"How d'y do?" he said, and, advancing, seized the Tub's sugary hand with a limp grasp. Gangle-shanks, in a dazed condition, did likewise. Then, suddenly realizing what he was doing, he flung it from him as if it had been a hot coal.

"Oh, rats!" he exclaimed, and sitting down on the edge of a wicker armchair, stared miserably at the food.

A man emerged from the house bearing a great clinking pitcher with a frost-covered exterior. He was immaculately dressed in a black cutaway. Beany rose.

"How d'y do?" he asked.

The stranger regarded him over the top of the pitcher with elevated eyebrows and nodded, ever so slightly.

"Set it there," commanded the hostess in a tone which rivaled the pitcher for temperature.

Beany felt that he had done something wrong and sat down, more disconsolate than ever. Gangle-shanks and the Tub, who had risen at the same time,

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also resumed their places. Gloom settled over the feast.

Audrey tried to raise the general level of spirits by chattering incessantly. She might as well have tried to raise the *Lusitania* with a trout line. The more she talked the more morose her callers became. They ate and glared and ate, but never a word did they speak.

Several things were quite clear to Beany as he took advantage of the silence to concentrate on the chocolate cake. The Tub and Gangleshanks had butted into his party somehow. By a stretch of imagination he could conceive of Gangleshanks having been asked in a fit of absentmindedness, but the presence of the Tub put the entire affair into the realm of farce.

He felt sorry for Audrey. He meant to get her alone before the afternoon was out and tell her so. That would also be a good opportunity for presenting the candy. He felt it cautiously. It was sticky, but still serviceable.

He must first try to get rid of the two unwelcome guests. Failing in this he determined to outstay them. His mind made up, he slid back into the chair and settled himself for an indefinite vigil.

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The shadows on the lawn lengthened slowly. Audrey's flow of small talk grew thinner and thinner, and finally became a trickle. The man with the cutaway removed the tea things. This time Beany did not even favor him with a glance. He sat staring at Audrey with moody expectancy. His silence was only equaled by that of Gangleshanks and the Tub.

The clock struck six, but they made no movement. "Let's go in," suggested Audrey. "It must be getting *very* late."

Among the young folks with whom she had always associated, such a remark from a hostess would have been interpreted as unforgivable rudeness. It would, at least, have cleared the house.

In this case it had no effect whatsoever. They filed silently after her into the living-room and seated themselves on a davenport before the open fire. The gentleman in the cutaway slid into the room and lit the lights. Beany's original suspicion that this was Audrey's father became almost a certainty. He was probably shy. Or perhaps he was even dumb. Beany was about to enquire, then decided not to.

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Half-past six struck.

“Do you like pictures?” Audrey, on the verge of tears, pulled a sheaf of magazines from the table.

“I don’t care,” said Beany magnanimously. The others merely drew the magazines towards them without a word.

Beany turned the pages with unseeing eyes. He guessed he could stick it as long as Gangleshanks or the Tub. The silence of the tombs descended once more.

The clock on the mantel struck seven.

Beany rose in a panic with visions of Hannah paging him up and down Chestnut street. At that moment the portières were drawn and a lady, who looked startlingly like an enlargement of her daughter, swept into the room.

“So nice of you to stay for dinner,” she said, taking the ends of Beany’s fingers and oscillating them gently to and fro.

“Not at all, ma’am.” Such a thought had been furthest from his mind. His social education, however, was not equal to refusing an invitation when couched in this unusual form.

Mr. Blossom entered, a heavy, preoccupied man.

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He greeted the boys with an absent stare and looked somewhat surprised when informed that they had consented to stay for dinner. After several ambiguous grunts, either of pleasure or disgust, he took up a position in front of the fire and followed the wall moulding back and forth with his eyes.

Audrey appeared to draw fresh courage from her mother. Her conversational powers returned. Mother and daughter filled up the gap until dinner was announced. Mr. Blossom merely raised himself on his toes occasionally and said "Umph." Beany gave himself up to gloomy misgivings.

If this was the social world he determined that he was gracing it for the first and last time. His emotions towards Gangleshanks were those of pure hatred. But for the Tub he felt only pity. Gangleshanks might possibly be a mild rival. The Tub could be nothing but a goat.

Somewhat to Beany's surprise, Mrs. Blossom placed the Tub next to Audrey at the dinner table. Beany had never seen such a large table for so few people. The gentleman in the cutaway served the soup. His relationship to Audrey became more and more puzzling. Perhaps he was a distant uncle.

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Beany smiled at him pleasantly, but was met by a stony stare.

Dinner was a trying affair. Beany was conscious that he had not been given an opportunity to wet his hair and that it was sticking straight up in consequence. He did not know what to do with half the dishes which were passed to him and so refused them. He essayed to analyze the weather with Mr. Blossom, but was only met by grunts. He rose, still hungry, but greatly relieved that the meal was over.

"I think you'd better take your guests into the music room," suggested Mrs. Blossom. "Your father has some law work to do."

The music room was an enormous affair with a grand piano at one end and an electric organ at the other. Beany was submerged by its vastness. He stood uneasily in the middle of the polished floor pulling at the buttons on his jacket.

"Do you play the piano?" asked Audrey.

He started guiltily. No one had ever accused him of such a thing before.

"Gosh, no."

"Would you like me to play?"

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"I don't mind."

"What would you like?"

"Any old thing."

"Do you know 'La Berseuse'? I've just learned it."

"I don't think so. Play it anyways."

Audrey sat down at the piano. As might have been supposed she played extremely well. Beany listened languidly to the first few bars, then, concluding that either Audrey was making a mess of it, or the thing didn't have any tune, he dropped into a sound sleep.

The piano stopped and the sudden silence caused Beany's head to snap upwards where it collided with the carved back of the chair. Audrey looked at him expectantly.

"Dog-gone it!" he exclaimed irritably.

"Would you like to hear the organ?" asked the patient Audrey.

No one showed either enthusiasm or dislike. Taking the silence for assent, she crossed the room and turned on the electric motor. The boys roused themselves sufficiently to stand behind her and stare languidly while she explained the various stops and levers.

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Glimmerings of interest were visible in Beany's face. Here was a piece of machinery worthy of his mettle.

"Can I do that?" he asked, as Audrey played the first record and rolled it back.

She relinquished her place immediately, willing to make any sacrifice to fan this unexpected spark of animation.

"Do you know how to start it?"

"Sure." Beany pressed half a dozen buttons, but nothing happened. Audrey showed him. It was so simple. This started it. This stopped it. This made it go slow or fast. This loud or soft. And these little knobs represented the musical instruments printed upon them.

Gangleshanks slid onto the piano bench beside Beany. They selected "Lead, Kindly Light" at random and let it unwind itself to a conclusion without interference. Beany pressed several exploratory buttons and the roll began to reverse. They reattached it immediately and started it on its return journey.

"Le's play it with the French Horn all alone by itself." Beany pushed in all the stops but one.

"That's rotten," commented Gangleshanks after

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listening critically for several moments. "Le's try this Vox Humana; whatever it is."

"That's a sort of a harp," explained Beany.

Vox Humana was also voted a frost, but the evening as a whole was improving with every revolution of the organ motor. Romance, jealousy and Audrey were all forgotten. "Lead, Kindly Light" was run through again and again with every possible variation of stop. Its crashing chords rolled through the house and out over the lawn to the wondering night birds.

"Le's pull out everything an' let her rip."

They pulled out all the stops, turned the tempo pointer as far to the right as it would go, set down the loud pedal, and pushed all the buttons.

"Here's a couple we haven't pushed," cried Gangleshanks, "way down underneath the ol' thing."

In the living-room Mr. Blossom sat at a large table surrounded by papers. The faint sounds of a piano drifted through the doorway. Then, after a short silence, the louder booming of the organ.

"Damn!" he exclaimed, fidgeting with his papers. "What did Audrey want to start that thing for?"

"And what an odd tune to select," remarked his

BEANY, GANGLESHANKS,

wife, as the strains of "Lead, Kindly Light" filled the house for the second time.

Again and again it was repeated. Each time it grew louder and the tempo swifter. Mr. Blossom seized his head and groaned.

"Why tonight of all nights?" he asked, through clenched teeth.

Gangleshanks pressed the newly discovered buttons. There was a moment of hesitation, then the roll began to turn slowly. From within the organ came a muffled, scraping noise. Gradually the Kindly Light gathered momentum. It went from hymn time to jazz, and from jazz to chaos. The volume of sound was remarkable. The organ trembled under the strain.

Beany and Gangleshanks were in an ecstasy. They beat a tattoo on the front of the organ with the palms of their hands and swelled the din with a barbaric chant which was their interpretation of the air.

Through the din they were conscious of a distant bellowing. Gangleshanks looked up and nudged Beany. Mr. Blossom was standing in the doorway, his mouth opening and shutting. It was impossible to hear his words.

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"Sir?" Beany and Gangleshanks slid off the piano bench and leaving the Kindly Light to its own resources, crossed the room to where their host was standing.

"Excuse me, sir. I couldn't hear you." Beany's voice showed the utmost respect and attention.

"I said, 'STOP THAT DAMN NOISE.' "

Beany looked about him enquiringly, apparently not quite sure what Mr. Blossom could mean. At that moment the last six inches of "Lead, Kindly Light" hove into view. The roll ended with a dull thud, but for some unknown reason the motor kept right on going.

"You mean the organ, sir?" asked Beany, surprised, indicating the particular instrument with his thumb.

"Yes, I mean——" He was interrupted by a clashing squeal from behind the organ. "Lead, Kindly Light" held out bravely for a moment then tore into shreds. Sounds, resembling an auto running at top speed with a broken connecting rod, took the place of the music.

Mr. Blossom pushed them aside and rushed to the aid of the tortured instrument. Audrey and

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the Tub appeared in the French window. They had been out on the terrace.

Gangleshanks looked at Beany. In this hour of danger he acknowledged his master.

"We best go," said Beany.

They passed into the hall and seized their caps from the marble table. Mrs. Blossom brushed past with unseeing eyes. A bell rang in the rear of the house. They were happily forgotten.

Only twelve-year-old Audrey remembered her social duties.

"Are you going?" she asked, but there was little in her voice which would have induced them to stay.

"I guess we best," mumbled Beany, his hand on the door knob. "Come on, Tub."

But the Tub made no move. He looked at Beany in surprise. "I ain't goin'," he said. "I bu-bu-bu-been asked to spend Sunday. I don't go in till Mu-mu-mu-monday mornin'."

They mounted their wheels in a daze. As they rode uncertainly down the dark driveway Beany reached into the pocket of his coat. A small, compact mass flew through the air and landed in the bushes. They heard the Tub's voice calling after

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them. Mingled with the old familiar tones was a new note—a note of confidence and triumph.

“See you in school mu-mu-mu-mu-mu-mu——”
His voice trailed out and died away in the night.

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